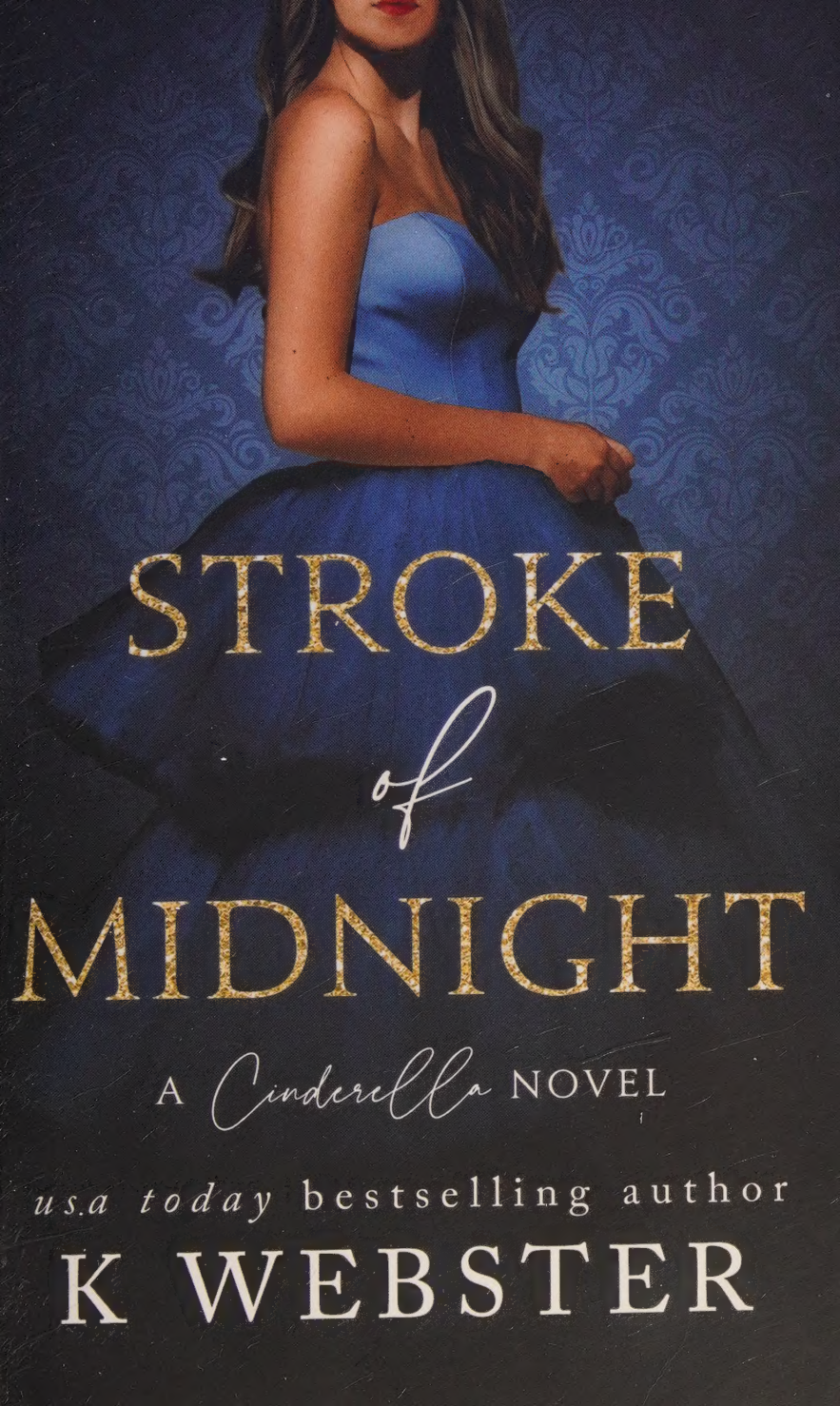
STROKE
of
MIDNIGHT
A Cinderella NOVEL
usa today bestselling author
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STROKE OF MIDNIGHT

A CINDERELLA NOVEL

K. WEBSTER

Stroke of Midnight
A Cinderella Novel
Dangerous Press © 2020

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1

WINSTON

The silence is bliss.

No murmurs, no laughs, no bullshit.

A sense of pride washes over me when they all yield to my simple demands. It's what keeps the wheel greased and moving efficiently. We're not a Fortune 500 company and one of the world's most prestigious acquisition firms for nothing. It takes an iron fist to keep everyone in perfect submission. All because they obey my one golden rule.

Work over play.

I reward them handsomely for it, too.

Halcyon requires everyone to play by the Constantine rules—by *my* rules—in order to maintain the utmost control over this godforsaken city.

The one-thousand-seven-foot skyscraper Halcyon Building is more than the hub for a multi-billion-dollar firm but is also the home of three five-star restaurants, a bar and cigar lounge, a state-of-the-art wellness spa, three elite residential floors, and a rooftop private terrace. It's one of the most revered and admired pieces of architecture in New York. We've been in every architectural magazine, and a movie was even once filmed here.

This building is our proverbial balls.

Huge. Powerful. Intimidating.

The Morellis only wish their presence in this city were anywhere close to ours. No matter how hard they try to claw their way out of the gutter and dress up to fit our world, they'll always be rats in fucking suits.

"Good morning, Mr. Constantine," Abby chirps. Pretty blonde. Big tits. Three kids.

I tip my head. "Abby."

"Good morning, Mr. Constantine," Brenda calls out, a wide smile on her wrinkled face. Sixties. Widowed. Obsessed with yoga.

"Brenda."

HR hates my obsessions.

Order. Cleanliness. Rules.

But, because I own them too, they indulge me despite whatever laws they were trained to follow.

"Good morning, Mr. Constantine," Cara says, waving a manicured hand. Failed model. Daddy issues. Loves Chinese food.

"Cara."

Our four secretaries that assist the executive offices follow the strictest guidelines. Namely, confidentiality isn't simply a request, it's a necessity. We have too many rats in this city waiting for a crack so they can weasel their way inside. It's my job to know everything about everyone who works beneath me to make sure they're solid, and I don't take well to vermin.

I reach the last desk—each one angled perfectly and aligned the way I like—and wait for my secretary to end her phone call. As soon as she's done, she plasters

on her veneered grin and hands me my coffee. Black and piping-hot with a dash of nutmeg.

"Good morning, Mr. Constantine." She bats her fake lashes at me. Divorced. Career ladder climber. Master organizer.

"Deborah," I say back. "Any calls?"

"Your brother. Perry." Ahh, Perry. Still sucking on Mother's tit like he can dip his hand in her deep, deep purse and pull out whatever the fuck he wants whenever he wants. Silly boy. "He said he's been trying to reach you. I asked if he'd like to set up a meeting, but he declined. Though, he used far more colorful words than I thought were necessary."

We both share a smirk.

Baby Constantine hates when he's pushed aside or ignored. I blame it on Mother's nanny, Ivory. The woman never could have children and treated Perry like he was hers. He's spoiled as fuck, and that's saying something coming from our blood.

"I suppose I'll give him a ring at some point next week," I say as I bring my mug to my lips. "Ahh, perfect as always."

Deborah preens. "The best for you."

I give her a wink, slightly annoyed at one of my self-imposed rules. *Don't fuck the staff.* Often, I consider breaking it for Deborah. She's so eager to please and that shit makes my dick really fucking hard. However, I know what a storm that would create. No matter how nice the woman looks in a pencil skirt and how the idea of having her on her knees under my desk is quite enticing, it'll end messily. Deborah is too good at her job to lose her to feelings gone awry. And they absolutely would go to hell because I'm not exactly a relationship kind of guy.

"I have a meeting with Ralph Bison from Bison Group in an hour. Hold my calls. If Perry calls, ask him how much." We both know Perry only blows up my phone when he needs money for whatever fucking prima donna reason he has next.

"Of course, sir."

I stride over to my office door and set down my deep-brown Venezia leather laptop briefcase so I can enter in my code. Though I trust Deborah with a lot, access to my office when I'm not here is a boundary she's not allowed to cross.

After opening my door, I pick up my briefcase and hit the lights, illuminating my massive office. It's not necessary considering the lack of furniture, but I like

the negative space. A sleek, five-foot wide black floating desk sits in the middle of the room. It can be converted to a standing desk with a push of a button, which is an absolute must considering how much pacing I tend to do while working. I stride inside, noting an unfamiliar sweet scent lingering in the air, and set my mug and briefcase down on my desk. Like always, I make my way over to one of the two walls of floor-to-ceiling windows so I can look down on the city we own.

This isn't New York City. This is Constantine City.

I smile as I think about the quote my father used to always say. *"The Constantines make the Rockefellers look like beggars."* Our family drinks, breathes, and shits money. That's *my* quote, much to Mother's horror.

The city sparkles under the May morning sun like diamond-encrusted model buildings. I could take the time to count each one that belongs to us, but I only have about forty more minutes until Bison and I discuss how he's going to bend over and let me fuck him. Not literally, but I'm going to figuratively make that man's rich ass my bitch. Point is, I don't have all day.

I'm extremely satisfied for a Friday morning, which will only bleed into my call, ensuring I get exactly what I want. I begin my usual pacing as the cogs inside my brain start turning. But then I hear a crackle.

Small. Insignificant. But, oh-so-wrong.

Pausing, I lift my foot. Nothing. I drop my foot and take another step. Crackle. A flare of fury rises inside me like a volcano, angrily erupting. Lifting my foot once more, I grab my ankle and twist to see what's on the bottom of my shoe.

A candy wrapper.

I pluck it from my sole, irritated as fuck at the red stickiness left on the bottom. I was never allowed candy as a child, and as a nearly thirty-six-year-old man, I've never so much as indulged once. This candy isn't one I'm familiar with.

Where the hell did it come from?

Yanking my shoe off so I don't track sticky residue across my floors, I storm over to my chair and take a seat. The wrapper says Starburst. Cherry flavor.

Someone was in my office.

Who?

One glance at my John-Richard Collection silver fog oil painting tells me no one fucked with my safe. It's unmoved and straight. All my files are kept on my laptop, protected and encrypted. There's nothing of value besides what's behind that painting.

"Deborah!" I bark out, growing more and more pissed by the second.

The clacking of her heels is hurried and frantic. Her brown eyes are wide as she takes in my furious state.

"Sir?"

"What the hell is this?" I growl, holding up the offending wrapper.

Her face bleeds of color. "I, uh, I'm not sure. Perhaps you tracked it in?"

Several long seconds go by where she begins to tremble, because we both know I did *not* track this shit in.

"I'll find out. I'll look at the security footage and contact the cleaning company—"

"I'll handle the footage," I snap. "You figure out who not only forgot to clean my office, but also thought it was okay to leave a fucking trail." I lean down to drag the wastebasket out from under my desk. Four more wrappers sit in the bin.

"I'll have them terminated immediately," she assures me, her face now turning purple with her own fury. "This is absolutely unacceptable."

This is a mistake of epic proportions.

Not only will the cleaner be let go if this is what this is, but I'll destroy the entire firm for allowing such unprofessionalism at Halcyon. It's abhorrent. I knew I shouldn't have allowed Mother to refer her cleaning company. I don't give a shit if Caroline Constantine will throw a bitch fit over this. Father never would have allowed this to happen.

"No," I bark out to Deborah. "I want you to start with who was working last night. Then I want every boss above them all the way to the top. Each and every name. I want them all in an email in the next half hour so *I* can deal with it."

"Of course, sir."

She clacks out of my office in a rush to do my bidding. Soon, Cara hurries in with a wet cloth. I fume as she cleans off the bottom of my shoe. She goes to snatch the wrapper from my desk, but I swat her hand away.

"Leave it," I grumble as I take my shoe back and shove it on my foot.

She nods before rushing out of the room. I grab my bag and pull out my laptop. Once I have it powered on, I flip through to the building security app. My sister Tinsley says I'm a control freak like our father. I call it keeping your eyes open. When you close them and assume everyone has your best interests at heart, they rob you blind or shoot you in the back. Having access to the security cameras is something I absolutely require and sift through often.

I flip over to the recording from last night. Around nine in the evening, the lights turn on, and then a woman in a light blue uniform walks in, dragging a cart with her. She starts to clean, but then sets her cloth down on my desk before sitting in my chair. I watch, disgusted, as she spins around in my chair enough times it makes me dizzy. Finally, she stops and then pulls a red, square, wrapped candy from her pocket.

I've caught the culprit.

Now I'm going to make her pay.

She unwraps it and then tosses the wrapper into the trash can. My anger rachets up when she stands and walks over to my bookshelves. Her finger runs along the shelves, and she then holds a finger up in front of her face as though she's inspecting it for dust. She admires my painting for a bit before returning to my

chair. The woman—no, girl based on her young features—continues to eat her candies one at a time. She kicks her feet up on my desk and proceeds to scroll through her phone. This goes on for at least a half-hour. I fast forward through this part. Finally, she pockets her phone and then plays with my desk buttons making it go up and down a few times. Eventually she stands, steps on one of the wrappers she missed tossing into the bin and walks it over to where I stepped on it. It transfers to the floor at that point. She shakes her head as though she's angry about whatever she's thinking about, and then walks right up to the glass. Once she's done gazing at my fucking city, she walks past the wrapper she managed to stick to my floor, grabs her rag off the desk, and then pushes her cart from the room.

Un-fucking-believable.

As soon as the lights go off on the video, I shut it down, ready to explode with fury. It takes several calming breaths before I manage to slow my heartrate. I'll deal with this brat soon enough.

Ping.

I open my email, eager as fuck to find what Deborah has uncovered for me.

Ash Ember Elliott.

Brand new employee at FGM Services.

Someone let this highly unqualified woman into my office. They're all going down for this. It's such gross negligence, I can barely see straight because of my rage.

I could go straight to the top and let the manager fire all those directly responsible for this outrage, or I could take matters into my own hands. Punish the offender directly. I quite enjoy a good verbal reaming.

Tonight, I'll deal with Miss Elliott.

She played in my office like a child, wrecked it with her mess, and took wages for a job she didn't do.

I've ended men for less, with a fucking grin on my face, too.

I will absolutely enjoy destroying her.

In fact, I'll be counting down every second until her arrival.

2

ASH

I stare at my bank statement, once again hurt by Dad's actions.

It's gone.

All but seven grand was taken out by my father. Not because he's a gambler or had to keep a roof over our heads. It wasn't because his car broke down or we suddenly had medical bills that needed paying.

No.

Dad robbed my college fund for one reason only.

Her.

It's hard not to hate the woman replacing your mother. Mom's been dead ten years, so I should be fine with Dad having remarried. Manda is a nice enough

woman. A little hoity-toity for my liking, but I get along with her okay. It doesn't mean I have to like her.

What I hate is that Dad is changing for her. Before he met Manda at a gala he'd been invited to last year, we'd been happy. Sure, we'd downsized from the home he shared with Mom upstate and moved to an apartment in the city to be closer to his job. We went from living comfortably to having to pinch pennies. Since Mom was no longer pulling in a sizable income with her speaking engagements, that meant Dad was the breadwinner. Luckily, they had plenty saved for my college.

But for Manda, he wanted to level up to her. Be someone he's not. Attend fancy functions and shower her with gifts. It wasn't until last week when I was going to ask him to pull some money out of my college savings account to purchase a car for my birthday, that I learned how much he'd bled it dry.

Five hundred thousand was drained over the course of six months.

All for her.

A pricey engagement ring. Expensive dinners. Trip to Europe.

I knew he was spending money on Manda, but I didn't realize it was coming out of my college fund. Seven

thousand won't even touch my first semester at Columbia University, which runs close to sixty grand a year plus housing, books, and meals.

"Manda has generously offered to pay your tuition, doll."

I can't help but shudder at Dad's reply when I burst into tears after he told me where my education fund went. He made too much money for us to qualify for financial assistance, and even if I apply for loans right now, I'm not promised to receive funding by the time tuition is due. I'd worked so hard to get into Columbia, and now it feels like it's being stolen away from me.

Sure, the rich doctor who's now my stepmother will pay for it.

But everything Manda does comes with strings attached.

"Someone's pouting," a deep, predatory voice says.

Triplet Terror #1. Otherwise known as Scout. My wicked, terrible, awful new stepbrother.

"Go away," I grumble, snapping my laptop closed so he won't see what little I have left in my account.

He prowls into my room, scrunching his nose up in disgust at my décor that litters the walls. Dad calls it

junk. I call it bohemian chic. I'd like to say I have an eclectic sense of style. I collect all sorts of fun, random things to make my space my own.

"Mom is going to bite your head off for putting pin holes all over the walls," Scout says, plopping down on my bed beside me.

Too close.

Always too close with this one.

"Where's Thing 1 and Thing 2?" I ask, giving him my bitchiest smile. Like I care about his brothers. I hate them all.

"Sully is at the driving range with Baron." His dark brown eyes narrow as he waits for a reaction. I give him none.

"Dad always wanted a son," I volley back. "And look, now he has three."

He scoffs as though he's offended to be called Baron Elliott's son. "Sparrow gives them until the end of the year." He grins at me, wolfish and terrifying. "Then Mom will destroy him just like her last three husbands."

Dr. Amanda Mannford or Manda the Maneater as I like to call her in my head—serial divorcee.

Anger swells up inside me, and it takes everything in me not to go off on him. I hate Scout because he's such a shit starter. Dad asked me to get along with Manda, which I try, but my three stepbrothers are another story entirely. They're all three bordering on psychotic, especially Scout.

"Dad says it's true love," I taunt. "Maybe they'll even have an oops baby together."

His dark eyes flash with cruelty. "She doesn't love him, and she barely tolerates you. Besides, we were test tube babies. Mom can't get pregnant the old-fashioned way."

"Whatever," I grumble. "Don't you have somewhere to be?"

He runs his knuckle up and down my spine, making me shiver from the touch. "Nah. I'm on babysitting duty today."

I snap my attention his way, glowering at him. In another world, I'd find someone like Scout attractive. Tall, muscular, chiseled jaw. His black hair and fair skin make him look like a vampire. I always got a thrill from the dark, dangerous types. But there's just something completely wrong with the Terror Triplets. They're missing some key elements most humans have.

In the three months I've lived with them, I've watched them make maids cry, destroy property for fun, and fuck more girls than humanly possible.

"You're still in high school," I spit out. "I'm off to college. I don't need babysitting."

"Technicality because we were held back. The three of us are older than you, Ash. But I wasn't talking about age. I was talking about the fact we have to make sure you don't try to screw over our mom. That takes constant watching."

"Fuck off," I snap. "And get out of my room."

"It belongs to Mom, not you," he sneers. "Best remember that. Mom would love to remind you of that. In fact, maybe I should tell her about all these new holes in her walls."

He stands and stretches, his T-shirt lifting to show off his muscled abs from playing lacrosse at Pembroke Preparatory School. When he catches me looking, his smile grows even more devious than before.

"Like what you see, little sister?" He cups his junk through his jeans. "I could show you a little more."

Gross.

I shoot him the bird, ignoring his taunts. Of the triplets, he's the one who takes his stalking seriously. The other two tolerate me, but he goes out of his way to probe and poke at me.

"Fine," he says as he makes his way to the door. "When you want some dick, you know where to find me. Warning, though. Mom will be very, very angry if you fuck her favorite son."

I refrain from throwing my laptop at him. Barely. "Go to hell, Scout."

His laughter can be heard echoing, long after he leaves.

Creep.

Chirp. Chirp. Chirp.

Just like always, my bird Shrimp goes back to making noise in his bird cage the moment Scout leaves. Scout is definitely the spawn of Satan, because Shrimp is scared to death of him. My pink parakeet loves everyone except my stepmother and her monster boys. Shrimp is a good judge of character.

My phone alarm blares, and I groan. Time to get ready for work. I hate this new job I've only been working at for a week. I hate my new family. I hate the fact I'm

going to have to rely on Manda to pay for my school. I hate everything.

Halcyon Building is silent as I push my cleaning cart along the halls. FGM Services cleans a few high-end buildings in the city, including this one. They're strict on hiring and require hella experience, but because Manda knows the owner, I was given a job. One I obviously need since Dad raided my college fund.

"Don't embarrass me."

Manda's words have been echoing in my head all week. Cleaning at these expensive offices isn't exactly rocket science. In fact, most of the offices don't require nightly cleaning, but we have to go through the motions anyway.

Like last night.

After Dad stood me up for my birthday lunch and none of my friends had plans to do anything for me, I spent my eighteenth birthday yesterday with the company of a noisy bird. And, because of Manda, I also got to work on my not so special day. I'd been annoyed and hurt last night. Most of the offices were pretty

clean, so I just glanced around to make sure they weren't too messy and took the night to goof off.

The thought of cleaning a whole floor of offices that are perfect feels redundant and boring. I need the money, but I don't know how much I can take of this.

I don't want to clean.

I want to sit behind a desk and crunch numbers. Talk shop. Plan expansions. My dad is an economic analyst, which is what I want to be too. I'd always imagined us going into business together and heading up our own firm.

Cleaning won't get me there.

I suppose playing nice with Manda the Maneater is my only resort at this point.

For the next hour, I rush through all the offices that don't need much more than the trash cans emptied, and then make it to the CEO's office. One day, I'll have an office like Winston Constantine, but I won't be some old fuddy duddy. I'll be a boss babe with style. My employees will love me, because I imagine I'll be cool as hell. Rather than hire a boring interior designer like whatever robot chose the furniture and décor for Halcyon, I'll do it all myself.

I'm once again daydreaming of my future that seems more and more murky these days as I fumble through my email on my phone to find the code to get into Big Man's office. Of all the offices, this one is the coldest and most boring. As though whoever Winston Constantine is, he doesn't do any sort of work, but instead gazes out the windows all day.

Finally, I locate the code and punch it in.

It's like twelve numbers long, and I fail a few times before it grants me entry. With a sigh of frustration, I push the door open and drag my rolling cart in after me into the dark office. I hit the light switch with my elbow and leave my cart in front of the door to prop it open. I fidget with the dumb uniform skirt I have to wear and wonder if anyone would notice if I wore jeans instead.

I grab the duster and make a beeline over to the painting on the wall. It's the best part of the office besides the cool desk that moves up and down and the windows overlooking the most picturesque parts of New York City. I touch the bottom of the frame to check for dust. As I imagined it to be, there's not a speck.

I'm just moving to the bookshelves when I hear a creak.

"You're supposed to clean it, not pretend," a deep, furious voice growls, scaring the ever-loving shit out of me.

"What the fuck, man?" I snap, whirling around, dropping my duster in the process. "You can't just sneak up..." I trail off as I drink in the man sitting in the desk chair.

Holy shit.

Was he here the whole time?

Fucking creepy!

But there's nothing creepy about his looks. He's not a fuddy duddy either, if this is Winston Constantine. He's fine as hell.

Older. Dressed to the nines in a three-piece navy suit that looks custom-tailored and expensive. A handsome, villainous smirk on his face. His dark blond hair is shorter on the sides and longer on top, styled perfectly, making it look as though he came from a photoshoot at Gucci or something. Just enough scruff to give him an edge despite his otherwise clean-cut appearance. It's his eyes that are mesmerizing.

Dark blue. Intense. Penetrating.

For some reason, it makes me think about my ex-boyfriend, Tate. The exact opposite of this man. Soft and sweet and gullible. Tate and I were a high school thing, but the moment we graduated a couple of weeks ago, we amicably broke it off knowing we were headed in different directions. This guy looks anything but soft, sweet, or gullible.

He looks scary.

Scary hot.

But still scary.

I clear my throat. "Sorry. I'll just empty your trash and be out of your way."

"No," he rumbles, his voice dripping in a menacing tone. "I've been waiting for you. It's time we chat, little girl."

3

WINSTON

The cameras lied.

Not about her actions—or inactions, I should say—but about her looks. I'd been too busy fuming this morning to take a closer look. Now, I'm getting my fill.

She's young.

Really young.

Like I'm not even convinced she's old enough to drive a car, much less work at a prestigious cleaning company. Her face is makeup free, but she's somehow still naturally pretty. Dangerously pretty. The kind of pretty that gets men like me in trouble.

Because...I want to fuck her.

She's barely said three sentences to me, and my dick aches to play with her. If she's underage, I'm screwed, because I know I'm going to have her bouncing on my dick regardless.

"Name," I growl, even though I know it already.

She fidgets, messing with the hem of her uniform skirt. It's just short enough to be distracting, drawing the eye to her golden thighs, but not short enough to be satisfying. If she bends over, I won't get a peek at what color panties she's wearing.

"Ash Elliott." She blows air up, knocking a loose, dark tendril of hair from her face.

"Take your bun out," I grind out. "Now."

Her sculpted brows pinch together in confusion. "What?"

"I didn't stutter, child."

She huffs and narrows her eyes at me. "I'm not a child."

Thank fuck.

"Let me see your hair," I demand. "Stop wasting my time."

"Why?" she throws back. "I have to keep it back per the rules."

"You're supposed to clean per the rules too, but we both know you're a little rule breaker."

Her cheeks grow rosy, and she parts her plump, pink lips in shock. Yes. I will absolutely have those lips wrapped around my dick. Imagining her choking on my cock makes me uncomfortably hard in my slacks.

"Do it before you really piss me off, Miss Elliott."

"I don't understand—"

"But you will," I interrupt. "Obey me."

Her hazel eyes flare at my words. Then, like the pissy brat she clearly is, she reaches up and yanks at her hair tie. She scowls as she tugs it loose, sending her hair falling in bouncy brown waves over one shoulder. Her brow lifts in challenge as if to say, "What now, asshole?"

I'm so used to women who live to please me that I don't understand why I'm aroused by this unruly thing. She should turn me off completely, as she's nothing like what I typically go for.

"Come here," I command, leaning forward to rest my elbows on my knees. "Now."

With enough attitude to make my palms twitch to pull her over my knee and spank the fire out of her, she

storms right up to me. I get a whiff of her cherry scent, reminding me why she's here in the first place. She left her candy wrappers littering my office.

"Get on your knees." I tilt my head up to glare at her. "Where you belong."

"Fuck you," she sneers.

"I'm about to," I threaten. "When I fire you and the entire damn cleaning company because of your incompetence."

She gapes at me in horror. "What? Why would you fire everyone else because of me? I don't understand."

"Because I am a Constantine."

"Elaborate, because that means nothing to me."

At this, I arch a brow in disbelief. "You know who I am."

"An asshole. Yep. I earned that five minutes ago."

Interesting.

It's unusual to not be known. Revered. Feared.

"An asshole who will ruin you in every way possible. I'm a tenacious asshole. When someone pisses me off, I

go to great lengths to make them understand they fucked with the wrong man."

"Why?" she demands. "What did I do wrong?"

"Taking wages for a job you didn't do. That's fraud, Miss Elliott."

"I'll leave—"

"No," I snap. "You're going to listen, or I'll plow through your life, destroying everything before you even make it to the first floor."

"I don't believe you."

"I take my job very seriously." I smirk at her, loving the flare of hatred in her hazel eyes.

"Job? So that's your job? Terrorizing nice people?" She waves a hand toward my empty desk. "That explains the sparse office. All the nefarious work happens inside that fucked-up head of yours!"

I reach up, gripping her jaw in my punishing grip, and pull her to my face. Her sweet, cherry scent fills my nostrils and stays. I want to lick every part of her to see what parts taste as good as she smells. A whine of fear escapes her as her hands settle on my shoulders, keeping her from falling into my lap.

"I didn't amass this fortune by being an idiot. I certainly don't let little girls run *my fucking show*." I relax my grip on her jaw, sliding my palm to her throat. Her pulse jumps against my thumb. "I'm here to offer you a job."

Wait? I am?

"I have a job," she mutters.

"No, Miss Elliott, you do not. You did a really shitty job there, so you're being let go."

"I need—"

"I know," I snap. "You're a fucking maid. Rich girls don't need to work, which means you need money. Are you ready to learn your new job?"

I sure as hell would, because I'm making this up as I go along. I'm in uncharted territory here. My colleague and friend, Nate, will laugh his fucking ass off when he gets wind of this.

"Are you going to hurt me?" Her eyes lose their fire as tears well in them. "I'm sorry, okay? I didn't mean to upset you."

Releasing her, I push back in my chair, putting distance between us. She rubs at her jaw, frowning at me.

"I want to punish you."

She blinks at me as though she's waiting for the punch line. The punchline is, there is no punchline. I just want to punish her. Among other things...

"Like spank me?" She laughs—fucking laughs at me. "No."

"My punishment is far more creative than your young mind could ever conjure up." I flash her a devious grin. "We could start tonight."

"Listen," she says. "I think I should go. I'll quit if that makes you happy."

I roll in my chair toward my desk and pat the smooth surface. "You quitting will make me happy, yes, and save the jobs of every person in that company."

She deflates at my words.

"But," I continue, "I want to give you a new job. One you can actually do. One that pays a hell of a lot more."

"I'm not going to be some *Pretty Woman* prostitute," she bites out. "I'm not Julia Whatshername and you're not Richard Grieco."

"Gere," I correct.

"The fact you know that means you're old." She rolls her eyes, her makeup-free lashes batting against her apple cheeks. "You're old enough to be my dad."

"I'm only thirty-five." I clench my jaw. Almost thirty-six.

"My dad will be thirty-seven this month," she sasses, cocking her hip out to one side. "Is that what this is? Some creepy 'call me Daddy' gig? Because, if so, ew. No."

I try not to outwardly cringe.

So, I guess I *am* old enough to be her father.

Lovely.

"Focus, child," I growl. "I'm not paying you to be my whore. If you want to fuck me, that shit is going to be for free."

She gasps. "I'm not sleeping with you!"

"Yet," I say with a smirk. "What I'm paying you to do is easy. I want to punish you. More like humiliate you, to be clear."

Her head cocks to the side. "Why?"

"Because it gets my dick really hard."

She chews on the inside corner of her bottom lip, her hazel eyes darting to my crotch and lingering there. "That's weird."

"You have no idea." I pat the desk. "Sit here and we'll get started."

"You can't humiliate me if no one is here," she volleys back. "It's just you. Defeats the purpose."

"We'll work up to public humiliation, my dear."

Her cheeks flame crimson. "How much?"

There she is. Everyone is a born negotiator when money is up for grabs.

"Make me an offer," I say, flashing her a wolfish grin.

"What will I be doing?"

"Nothing too difficult. Just something to please me. Five minutes."

"Five hundred dollars," she blurts out.

A low baller, I see.

"A hundred dollars a minute?" I bite back a laugh.

"Take it or leave it, buddy."

"I'll take. And take and take. Now sit on my desk."

She frowns, stalling for a moment, but then lifts her chin before stomping over to the edge of my desk. Under her breath, she curses before hoisting herself onto the smooth surface. The desk is tall enough that she swings her feet back and forth beneath her like a child.

"Where's your phone?" I ask, leaning back in my chair.

"Why do you want my phone?" Her eyes are wide and horrified. "You're going to record it?"

"What is *it*?"

Her neck burns bright red. "I don't know."

"No, Miss Elliott, I'm not going to record *it*. You're going to record *it*. A little gift for later."

"Why?"

"Because it embarrasses you."

"You get off on embarrassing me?" She pins me with an annoyed glare.

"Absolutely."

"Fucking freak," she mutters as she yanks her phone from her pocket. "Whatever."

"Lean on your elbows and put your feet up on the edge."

"What are you going to do?" Her voice is shrill and shaky.

"Nothing."

"I don't get it," she grumbles.

"It's like art," I explain. "All in the eye of the beholder. Do as I say. Stop wasting our time. The clock starts when you obey."

She holds my stare for a long moment before finally letting out a harsh, exaggerated sigh. Her body trembles as she moves to get into my requested position. It's cute how she tries to awkwardly keep her thighs closed, but the position won't allow it.

"Are you recording?"

"N-No."

"There's a timer on your phone. When the recording gets to five minutes, you're done."

"That's it?"

"For now."

"Are you like going to..."

"Start recording."

Another sigh.

"It's going," she grumbles.

"Show me."

Sure enough, it's recording. Good girl.

"Part your thighs," I demand. "I've been dying to know the color of your panties. Show me."

She groans and parts her thighs. I roll my chair closer, leaning forward to look down into her skirt between her open thighs. Red. Like her cherry candies.

"Are you going to, um, touch me?"

"Do you want me to?" I murmur, inhaling her sweet-scented arousal.

"No," she barks out. "Do I still get paid?"

"Are you embarrassed?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll still pay you." I smile at her. "Show me more."

She curses again, grabbing her skirt with one hand and yanking it up her tanned thighs, exposing her young flesh. "Happy now, sicko?"

"I'm getting there. It seems you are, too."

"What? Why?"

"Your panties have a wet spot, Miss Elliott. You're turned on."

"I am not," she growls.

"Denial won't change the fact you absolutely are. Give me your camera," I order. "Now."

She reluctantly hands it over. I turn the camera to record the evidence, even zooming in and letting it linger there. Once I'm sure she's seen the proof she can study later, I hand her back the phone.

"Three minutes left," she mutters.

"Easiest two hundred dollars you ever made. Am I right?"

4

ASH

What the fuck am I doing?

An hour ago, I could have never dreamed this is where I'd end the night. I fucked up. I know I did. I messed with the wrong guy. Slacking off on the CEO of some big corporation was a mistake. Now, I'm paying for it.

I'm confused as to why he wants this, but I'm invested now. I mean, five hundred dollars is more than I'll make all week. It's weird as hell, but he's not forcing me or hurting me. It's not horrible.

"Are you a virgin?" he asks, his intense blue eyes boring into me.

"Sorry to burst your bubble, but no." I give him my bitchiest smile.

"Good." His lips kick up on one side in a maddeningly handsome smile that makes my heart sputter in my chest. "I would hate to have to be gentle our first time. Gentle simply isn't my style."

Tate was gentle.

A sweet, albeit inexperienced lover.

Once a month, he'd take me somewhere nice and then we'd have obligatory relationship sex that fell flat in more ways than I can count.

The idea of sex with this monster is thrilling.

My God, I am sick.

"I'm not sleeping with you," I remind us both. I sure as hell need the reminder.

"Yet," he says again, winking at me. "Have you ever fingered this juicy, young pussy?"

A burst of flames lick over my skin. "You're a pervert!"

"Says the girl who's lying on a desk exposing herself to a man her daddy's age. Who's the real pervert here?"

I have just over a minute left.

I can do this and then get the hell out of here.

"Aww," he croons. "I upset you. You've gone silent on me. Cat got your tongue? I'd offer mine, but it'd take a lot longer than a minute to lick you just the way you crave."

"I'm literally counting down until I can take my money and leave," I snap. "Let's do it in silence."

He inhales me again, which makes me shudder with desire. It's so feral and disgusting, but I'm kind of into it, which freaks me out. Tate never sniffed me down there. Ever. Hell, I could barely get his mouth to venture that way.

"Tell me why you work, Miss Elliott. Why would you be willing to do this bizarre request for five hundred dollars?"

I pierce him with a nasty glare. "I can't pay for college with my good looks alone."

He studies me for a long moment, his gaze penetrating me in ways I secretly wish other parts of him would. "Where's this beloved daddy now? Why isn't he paying for his good girl to go to college?"

"It's none of your business."

"As your new employer and sharer of your sordid dirty little secret, I believe it is my business."

I glower at him, hating that I wonder how his scruffy cheeks would feel on my inner thighs. Tate had the smoothest baby face. This man seems like he'd scratch me and leave a reminder of himself with just his facial hair alone.

"Why are your panties so wet?" he asks, a vicious grin on his face. "Would your daddy be ashamed to know his daughter was so kinky?"

"I'm not kinky, asshole," I snap. "Just trying to get paid."

He laughs, the sound demonic and sexy all at once. "Clearly. What do I owe you now? Six, seven hundred? Or are you trying to drag it out to a grand? Miss Elliott, I admire your tenacity, but I can tell you're going to drain me of every penny I've got, because I could do this all night."

I snap my eyes to the phone and let out a horrified mewl. Eight minutes I've let this video go on because he distracted me. I press the button to end the recording, close my phone, and shove it into my pocket as I sit upright. My skirt is high up my thighs.

"If you leave a wet smear on my desk, don't worry about cleaning it up. My new cleaning lady will take

care of it." He rolls his chair back, allowing me the room to get off the desk.

I'm furious and humiliated as I carefully ease myself down so I don't leave anything for anyone else to clean up. His eyes track my movements as I shimmy my skirt back into place, ending his pervy peep show.

"I'm ready to get paid now," I bark out, hating how my voice shakes. "Asshole."

He smirks, his blue eyes flaring with heat. "One day soon I'll come up with something fitting for that mouth." When I gape at him, he shakes his head. "Not my dick, Miss Elliott. I told you if you want that, I'm not paying you. I'm talking about punishment. More humiliation. Don't worry, I'll think of something."

I ignore him, crossing my arms over my chest. My foot taps impatiently as I wait for him to get me my money. Slowly, he rises to his feet, all six feet and something towering over me. I'm frazzled, and he looks flawless. Absolutely unruffled. I hate him for this.

He straightens his tie, pats me on the head in a condescending move, and then strides over to his painting. My eyes, against my will, sweep over his ass that looks too good in a pair of navy slacks. He reaches up and pulls on

the corner of the frame, sweeping the painting out to reveal a safe hidden behind it. I watch as he enters in another long-ass code like the one on his office door and then opens it. Inside, documents, weapons, and stacks of money can be seen. The sight of the guns causes a trickle of unease to slide through me. It makes me realize I'm out of my depth with this way older, way powerful man. He could probably shoot me and make it look like an accident. No one would care, because he's rich.

As he busies himself counting his money, I curl my arms around myself. Shame burns through me as I acknowledge what I've just done. I played into someone else's dirty fantasy for money. I'm no better than a prostitute. Mom would roll over in her grave if she knew. Dad would have a coronary.

Tears burn at my eyes, and I hopelessly try to blink them away. All it manages to do is send them skating down my hot cheeks. I bite hard on my bottom lip to keep the sob in my throat. Footsteps near me, but I can't meet his eyes. Not anymore. Not right now.

"Look at me." His deep, husky, commanding voice doesn't broker room for an argument. I find myself obeying though I hate to. "Good girl."

His praise washes over me, chasing away some of my shame, which *really* makes me feel fucked up.

"You earned this," he murmurs. "You've seen my safe. There's plenty more where that came from." He grips my wrist, pulling it away from my body, and twists my palm face up. "Eight hundred for your time and two for a tip."

I jerk my confused stare to meet his probing blue eyes. "What? You're giving me a thousand dollars for whatever *that* was?" My voice is shrill. "Why?"

He presses the money into my palm, lingering his warm touch there. The connection causes my body to tremble. I'm almost disappointed when he pulls away. Almost. I shove the money into my pocket without counting.

"You deserved it. Earned every penny." He leans closer. "Can I tell you a secret?"

I clench my jaw and give him a clipped nod.

"I would have paid a *lot* more for that, Miss Elliott."

"What?" I shriek. "Why didn't you tell me I could ask for more?"

"You have to learn to negotiate." He shoves his hands into his pockets and shrugs. "In business, it's imperative."

"How much?" Anger chases away my shame. "How high could I have gone?"

"In a high-end kink club here in the city, I'd have to pay at least five times what I paid you."

I gasp, furious at the gall of this man. "I could have earned five thousand dollars?"

"I said I'd pay five times that at a club," he growls. "Not for you."

Oh.

Ouch.

I deflate, dragging my eyes to our shoes that are too close for comfort. His strong grip finds my jaw, pushing my head back up to look at him.

"For a young, bratty girl who wears red panties and smells like cherry candy, I'd pay a whole lot more than for those *professionals* at the club." His thumb strokes over my jawbone. "You could've pulled ten grand out of me. Twenty if you let me keep the panties."

Dirty fucking bastard!

I shove at his stupidly hard chest, forcing him to drop his hold on my jaw. "Good riddance, asshole."

Storming over to my discarded duster, I pick it up and then hurry over to my cart. I'm just pushing it out of his office when his words stop me.

"Negotiating can be fun," he calls out. "I have money. Lots of it. You'd be surprised what I would be willing to pay for."

"Fuck you."

He chuckles. "Again, that's a freebie. I'll text you later."

Swiveling around, I glower at him. "I didn't give you my number."

"I'll find it. When I do, be prepared to negotiate. Do you have Apple Pay?"

I don't reward him with an answer, but instead flip him off. I've already given him too much.

"Set it up if you don't have it," he booms. "I'd pay five hundred dollars just to watch you suck on that middle finger for thirty seconds."

Five hundred dollars?!

"A picture, and it's going to cost you a thousand," I scream back at him, hating how tears are once again flooding my cheeks.

"Ahh, look how you're learning. Good girl. Talk soon."

I hate how the entire elevator ride down to the bottom floor I sob, knowing I'd absolutely give him that stupid picture for a thousand dollars.

In less than thirty minutes, this man completely transformed who I thought I was. I dread to think what he could do in a day or two, or a week.

He's going to destroy me.

What's worse, I'll let him.

5

WINSTON

I stare at the second hand on my Breguet 18k white gold retro watch as it ticks slowly by. Mother is droning on about a gala to Tinsley while Perry adds his two cents. Nate, my wingman whenever I'm forced to have brunch with my family, cheerfully asks my mother a million questions, which I know thrills her to no end. Vivian, Elaine, and Keaton all stare at their phones, wishing away the minutes, much like I do.

"That's great, Mother," Perry rumbles. "Right, bro?"

When Keaton doesn't answer, I cut my gaze to my obnoxious younger brother. "Pardon?"

Tinsley rolls her eyes at me, and Mother smirks. Perry's blue eyes that match mine exactly, sparkle with

mischief. He may be an adult, but he's still every bit a child to me.

"Her idea about your birthday party." Perry leans back in his chair, curling his arm around Mother's shoulders as if to claim her as only his.

Mother preens a little at her son's attention. "Oh, darling," she coos. "Winston doesn't care about such things."

For fuck's sake. Here we go.

"I care, Mother, but I'm not Tinsley," I grind out, ignoring my sister's huff of annoyance. "I don't need you to invite half the city and throw an extravagant ball like her coming out party. But, if that's what you wish to do, I'll be there in my best tux. You know I always appreciate your efforts to make me happy."

"Of course you do," Perry placates. "Our mother spoils us. It's why I want to spoil her in return. That reminds me, Winston, I'm going to need five hundred grand."

Keaton snorts, and Vivian laughs.

"Perry, baby, you know you don't have to buy me a thing," Mother says with a laugh. "Your father left me all this." She waves a manicured hand toward her pala

tial estate, also known as the Constantine Compound. "And I have you children who indulge me in frequent Saturday brunches. What more could a mother ask for?"

Elaine pretends to gag, making Nate stifle a chuckle from beside me.

"How about a trip to Barbados with her favorite son?" Perry asks, leaning in to kiss her cheek.

"Suck up," Keaton mutters under his breath.

"Children," Mother admonishes, though she clearly loves the attention and banter. "Behave, please. We have a guest. I'm sure, Perry, that Winston will get you the money you need."

"For the record, a trip to Barbados doesn't cost half a million," I grit out. "My guess is it's another 'investment.'"

Perry's face burns crimson, his blue eyes flickering with fury. "My investments always pan out."

"Not what Harold says," I toss back, reminding him we share the same accountant.

"Enough business," Mother chides. "Talk it out over lunch next week, boys. Today, I want us to celebrate."

As Mother dives into whatever it is she really brought us here for, my thoughts roll back to Ash. That girl hasn't left my mind since she sat up on my desk last night. I rubbed one out in the shower later with images of her wet panties seared into my brain. My mind has been whirring ever since as I come up with a million different things I want her to do.

My phone buzzes on the table. I pick it up to discover it's an email with a phone number and other information on Ash Elliott from Deborah. Deborah is a hound when I need information, uncovering everything I could possibly want. In her email, she included a picture of a charming five-bedroom recently-restored three point five-million-dollar brownstone in Brooklyn.

With a home like that, she certainly doesn't seem the type to need the money, but color me intrigued.

Ash Elliott was accepted to Columbia University and is set to attend in the fall. No scholarships or loans in place, which means it's being privately paid for. She just turned eighteen two days ago and lives with her father, Baron Elliott, and her new stepmother Dr. Amanda Mannford.

Interesting.

I've seen Dr. Mannford plenty in my circle. She's a highly sought-after plastic surgeon to the stars and other elite. It's clear Baron married into her money.

So why does Ash slum it as a maid for FGM Services?

Furthermore, why did she let me defile her for the promise of a few hundred bucks?

I'll find out.

After thanking Deborah for the information, I shoot a text to Ash.

Me: Did you set up Apple Pay?

The response is immediate. Kids these days always have their phones. Ash is absolutely a kid, too. The girl is only two days into adulthood. I'm a sick fuck, because her youth turns me on. I'm so used to the spoiled socialites Mother continually tries to set me up with that Ash is a breath of fresh air. Cherry-scented air.

Ash: I already had it set up.

I smirk at her sassy response.

Me: I want my picture.

Ash: Send me the money first.

Me: You don't trust me? Fine. I'll send it first this time, but the other times you'll be expected to perform before you get paid.

Quickly, I shoot a grand to her. As soon as it's confirmed, I send her another text.

Me: Don't keep me waiting, little girl.

She only takes a moment to respond. The picture comes through making my dick thicken in my slacks, which is annoying considering I'm having brunch with my family. Her dark hair is piled up messily on top of her head, and she's once again makeup free. The camisole she wears is pale pink, and I can see her nipples through the fabric. As requested, she has her middle finger between her lips and she's wearing the bitchiest expression known to man.

Fuck.

"Damn," Nate mutters from beside me, leaning over to get a better look. "Who's the hottie?"

I flip my phone over and shoot him an icy glare. "My maid."

"Goddamn, Constantine. All my maids are like sixty and ugly as fuck. Lucky sonofabitch." He playfully

elbows me. "If you ever want to share, I have some pipes for her to clean."

"I'll keep that in mind," I grumble. "Excuse me."

Though my mother shoots me a pointed look, one that encompasses irritation and disappointment, I leave the table and walk back into our stately home. I weave through the house until I find one of my favorite places to hide out in. Dad's old study. When I was a boy, I spent many hours in here with my father, aching to be just like him.

I sit in his leather chair, inhaling the lingering scent of cigar and bourbon. I'll never admit it to anyone, but I miss him. He was my idol and best friend. His death was hardest on me, though I'd never tell my siblings that.

Now that I'm alone, I reply to Ash.

Me: That wasn't so hard, was it?

Ash: Lose my number, creep.

Me: You can't get rid of me now. Not when I know how wet your panties get when you're embarrassed. Are they wet now?

Ash: No.

Me: Do you want them to be?

Ash: NO.

Me: I'll send you a hundred dollars for every selfie you send me.

She doesn't reply. A few minutes later, she sends me three in a row. She's taken the time to write a message on pink sticky notes for each one. Fuck. You. Asshole.

Me: Cute.

I shoot three hundred dollars to her.

Me: What embarrasses you, Ash? Nudity? Dirty talk? Being told to do certain things? The more I know, the easier this will go.

Ash: I'm not ashamed of my body.

Me: You shouldn't be. It's hot as fuck. What about fucking yourself with objects? Does that embarrass you?

Ash: I can't with you.

Me: You can, and you will. Because, little girl, you may live in a three-million-dollar home, but you're poor as fuck. Your new

stepmommy not giving you an allowance? You need my money, and I need your services.

Ash: You're a real asshole. Can't get dates with normal women because you're such a freak?

Me: I could have any woman I wanted. They don't intrigue me like your unruly ass does. I'm quite enamored with the possibilities between us. I'll send a car for you at seven to bring you to my apartment for dinner. We can play then.

Ash: I'm not coming over.

Me: Two thousand dollars says you will.

Ash: This is insane! You're insane!

Me: No, Ash, it's not insanity. It's boredom. When you're rich as fuck, not much excites you anymore. When you find something that does, you obsess over it. You, my child, are my newest obsession.

She doesn't respond after that.

It doesn't matter, though. She will get in that car, and she will come see me because money talks. Lucky for me, I have endless supplies of it.

6

ASH

This is crazy.

I'm not going to that man's home. Nope. Not happening. Never.

Shrimp chirps from on top of his bird cage as though he agrees with me. I walk over to my parakeet and stroke my finger down over the top of his head. I'd gotten this bird when I got my first period. Dad was so horrified and confused by my raging emotions, he tried to make me happy by letting me get a pet. It helped, and I immediately fell in love with a bird of all things.

"He's a sicko," I tell Shrimp. "If I go over there, I'll end up hacked into tiny pieces and stuffed in a freezer."

Shrimp chirps and flaps his wings.

"Right?" I say. "Total psycho."

"Boo."

I shriek, scaring Shrimp who flies over to my bookshelf. Whirling around, I shove Sully out of my way. Of the Terror Triplets, Sullivan Mannford is the most tolerable. A manwhore but less mean. "Get out of my room, freak."

He smiles as he rakes his gaze up my front, his eyes lingering at my chest. "Mom and Baron left for The Hamptons. We've got the place to ourselves. You actually going to party with us or are you still too good?"

I've seen their parties.

Sex. Drugs. Alcohol.

Not my scene. Especially when the Terror Triplets get that glint in their eyes when they've knocked back too many shots. The last thing I need is to let my guard down around the three of them while inebriated. I'd wind up pregnant and full of STDs most likely.

"I have plans," I lie.

His dark brown eyes narrow as he scrutinizes me. "With the psycho who's going to put you in his freezer?"

I hate when they snoop on me.

The three of them are the creepiest fuckers.

"That's the one." I give him a sweet smile. "My new boyfriend."

He tenses, sudden anger rippling through him. "You don't have a boyfriend."

"I do too," I snap back. "What's it matter to you?"

"You're ours. I thought we made it perfectly clear to Tate."

I gape at him. "What? Tate and I broke up because we're going separate ways."

At this, Sully laughs. "You don't really think someone like Tate would let someone like you go, do you? He's a three, and you're a ten."

Gross.

No one wants to be told they're hot by their stepbrother.

"You're annoying me. Please leave."

"We'll run this one off too," Sully vows, his voice growing low and cruel, sounding much like Scout. "And each one after that."

"Why?" I demand, crossing my arms over my chest. "Why can't I have a boyfriend?"

"They'll try and save you." He shrugs. "And we want you right where you're at. Helpless. Dependent. Flailing."

I blink at him, disgusted at his words. "You can't control my life."

"That's what you think, Ash."

Rather than continue to fight with him, I turn on music and ignore him until he finally leaves. At this point, I'm looking forward to dinner with Winston. Because if I have dinner with him, I'll make more money. The more money I make, the sooner I can get out from under the Mannford influence.

Winston wants to shame and embarrass me but pay me for it?

So be it.

I'm a tough girl. I can handle whatever he throws my way.

"Mr. Constantine is expecting you," the doorman says, offering me his arm. "This way to his private elevator."

Oh, Jesus.

Winston is so over the top. A private elevator? Come on.

With a clipped nod, I follow the sharply dressed man into an elevator that has to be accessed by a key card. Once inside the shiny metal box, I glance at my reflection. I vowed to myself I wouldn't dress up for this man. I'm not a pretty doll he can dress up and force to do tricks. I chose comfort over class. Fitted, worn denim jeans with more holes than material that I've rolled up my calves. Cute tan slide-on sandals with a leather bow on top. A white tank knotted just above the hem of my jeans. I left my hair down and in messy brown waves. I'm wearing my big silver hoops and several weaved brown bracelets. I also didn't put on any makeup, because I don't want him to get the wrong idea.

This is a job. Nothing more.

We arrive at the penthouse floor. The doors open, and the doorman ushers me into a pristine hallway. It's bright and white and sleek, much like Halcyon Building. He guides me over to a giant mahogany door and

then uses his keycard to unlock it. The man steps inside and holds the door open for me.

"Have a seat in the living room. He'll be with you soon," the man says before closing the door behind him on his way out.

Silence greets me.

It's almost deafening. Intrusive. Maddening.

I clear my throat, the sound echoing in the entryway. Nothing. Curiosity has me walking toward the open living room. The design in here is much different than his office or this apartment building. It's ridiculously expensive—everything from ornate, artsy light fixtures to the unusual dark wood floors that curve in strange patterns but somehow slot together perfectly. Where his office is bright, his home is dark.

Fit for a villain.

I can't help but smirk as I take in the beautiful living room space. The entire back wall is floor to ceiling windows. It's impressive because the ceiling in this area is at least thirty feet high. The walls and ceiling are painted a deep navy blue, reminding me of his eyes.

Stop.

Yuck.

I'm not going to compare walls to his eyes. That's sick, infatuation type of behavior. I'm absolutely not infatuated by this motherfucker. Rather than think about his eyes, I stare up at the massive light fixture that looks like a network of lit-up nerves with tiny bulbs at each end. A web of light and metal. It's beautiful.

"My favorite part of this room," a deep voice rumbles from above me somewhere.

I follow the sound to find him standing at the top of his stairs. He's dressed down in a pair of gray slacks and white button-up shirt. The sleeves have been rolled to his elbows revealing muscular forearms, and his top two buttons are undone. His hair is perfect as ever, and he wears a shiny pair of black shoes. Without a care in the world, he descends the stairs at a slow, infuriating pace. As though he enjoys making an entrance and forcing me to notice.

To piss him off, I look away and walk over to the windows. The view is breathtaking, but I won't tell him that.

"Are you hungry, Miss Elliott?"

I tense up and turn to face him. "I'm here for dinner, aren't I?"

His dark blue eyes sparkle at my bitchy tone. It's as if he delights in my attitude. I'm annoyed that rather than pushing him away, it only excites him further. Fucking freak.

"Come then, little girl," he says, gesturing for me to follow him. "Francis already set the table, and Hans is ready to put our steaks on."

Of course this spoiled bastard has a waitstaff and chef on hand. *Of course* he does.

Despite nerves twisting in my gut, I *am* hungry. The Terror Triplets were causing a ruckus in the kitchen earlier, so I skipped lunch to avoid dealing with them. That's the only reason I'm complying with Mr. Kinky Fuck.

He shows me into a dining room that's surprisingly small. I'd expected a thirty-place-setting table. Not a simple bistro-type table with four chairs. It has me relaxing a bit. He pulls out a stool and then offers his hand. Reluctantly, I take it and allow him to help me onto the high seat. His touch is warm, firm, and oozes power. I hate that a thrill races down my spine quickly followed by the hollow feeling of loss when he lets go.

He takes the seat beside me and then calls out to Francis.

A gray-haired woman with hair pulled into a severe bun walks in with a bottle of wine. She fills our glasses with the red liquid before hurrying away. Winston picks up his glass.

"A toast," he says, raising the glass. "To new adventures."

I barely refrain from rolling my eyes. "Right."

We clink our glasses together, and he flashes me a devious grin. My body warms several degrees. I quickly down the bitter wine, eager to distract myself from his penetrating stare.

"You look good enough to eat tonight," he rumbles.

"Lucky for me, we're having steak instead." I smirk at him. "Cut the crap, Winston. Tell me what you want from me."

"Eager to make money, I see."

I flip him off. Big mistake. He grins wide, revealing each perfect white tooth in his stupid-hot mouth.

"I find your middle finger very sexy," he drawls out, eyeing me over his glass. He sips it, his gaze never straying from my lips. "I find your lips even sexier."

Francis appears with a basket of breadsticks. She uses tongs to place one on my plate. It glistens with melted butter, making my stomach growl.

"Thank you," I mumble.

She gives me a polite smile and then serves Winston one before exiting again.

He reaches into his pocket to pull out his wallet. My eyes drift to the way it bulges with money. After he pulls the wad out, he sets it on the table.

"This belongs to you." He pushes the stack toward me. "For dinner."

I stare at the two thousand dollars we agreed upon. It doesn't feel real. Since meeting Winston, I've made over four thousand dollars, kicking me up to eleven grand in my college fund. It's annoying the relief I feel. It would have taken me months to make that much at FGM Services. I know Manda offered to pay, but I'd feel much better if I could somehow pay for it myself, even if it's just books and supplies. I hate having to be indebted to her.

I go to reach for the money, but his hand covers mine, stopping me. My heart does a nervous skip in my chest.

"Want to earn more?" His eyes flare with challenge.

I can do this.

I can endure his weird-ass fantasies because he pays well.

"Yes," I tell him with false bravado.

"Then wrap those lips around your breadstick. Lick it and suck it. Like you wish it were my dick." He nods at the bread on my plate. "Five hundred dollars."

God, he is so freaking bizarre.

I'm about to tell him where to shove his breadstick when I decide to negotiate for more. It's just a breadstick, not his dick. I can do this. Easily. I'm practically salivating for it anyway. The bread, not his dick.

"Eight," I counter.

"A grand if you moan my name while you do it and don't stop when Francis brings our food." He winks at me. "Easy money."

"Fifteen hundred and I'll gag on it."

He fists his hand, his jaw clenching, the first sign of a normal human reaction. Heat burns down my spine, pooling in my pelvis. I'm not turned on by him. Not a bit.

"You have yourself a deal, little girl."

Closing my eyes, I attempt to distance myself from him as I pick up my bread. He clears his throat, earning my stare, and shakes his head.

"Eyes on me," he murmurs. "Everything you do, I want your eyes on me."

A flash of irritation bursts through me, but I obey. Because . . . duh, fifteen hundred bucks. I lick the bread and moan because it tastes that good. It won't be so hard after all. The most difficult part will be not eating the savory bread.

"Mmm," I moan. "Winston."

It's fake as fuck, but whatever. I'm not an actress.

"Good girl," he croons, his words wrapping around my heart like thorny vines, puncturing holes in my indifference. Like the predator he is, he senses what his praise does to me and delivers more. "So obedient. It makes me want to spoil your pretty ass. Give you everything you could ever want. I hope you're making a list, sweet girl."

I lick the top of the breadstick and then suck on it, secretly eager for more of his words. When I take the bread deep into my mouth, it makes me gag. My eyes water and I sputter. My eyes fly to his. A strange, satisfied glint flickers in his gaze.

"More," he rumbles. "I like it when you gag."

It feels stupid, but I force myself to gag twice more on the breadstick. Saliva runs down my chin. He reaches forward with his napkin, dabbing it away, before sitting back in his seat. My lashes are wet from tears because gagging yourself will do that to you, and my throat burns from the garlic. I'm over it, but I promised to continue until Francis returns.

Time passes slowly.

I realize I should have negotiated a start and stop time.

I'll remember for next time.

Next time?

A tremble of excitement ripples through me. I'm clearly just as fucked up as Winston for agreeing to do this. It's not completely horrible either. When you're getting dollar bills thrown at you, and don't have to take your clothes off for it, it's actually fairly easy.

Francis appears with two plates. I gag on the bread again. She glances over at me, a confused look on her face, but then quickly moves my bread plate and sets the food down before scurrying off. As soon as she's gone, I take an exaggerated bite of my bread and chew

with my mouth open. Hopefully that will kill his boner.

He laughs, a riotous sound that infects deep parts of me I didn't know existed. I roll my eyes at him, instead choosing to admire my meal. A nice filet mignon seemingly cooked to perfection. Asparagus and mashed potatoes.

Buzz.

I pull my phone from my pocket to learn he's just sent me fifteen hundred dollars.

Insane.

He's positively insane.

But he also might just be my ticket out of the Mannford home.

7

WINSTON

It's cute how her cheeks remain pink after the naughty act she did before dinner. All through our meal, I kept quiet, forcing her to think about what she'd done. I'd been hard as fuck watching her try to deep throat the bread and slobbering all over herself in the process. She apparently gives head better than she cleans.

Hans outdid himself as usual on the meal, and the bananas foster cream pie was fantastic. Once Ash is nice and stuffed, I stand and offer her my hand.

"Let's have a chat. See how much more you can earn tonight."

Irritation morphs her pretty features, but she takes my hand. So small and soft. I love the feel of it in mine. Rather than let her go, I guide her into my living room

over to the L-shaped pale-gray sofa. She goes to sit, but I shake my head.

"On your knees."

Her eyes widen, fear glinting in them.

"Not for a blowjob, dirty girl," I chide. "But because I quite like seeing you obey me."

I expect her to argue or negotiate, but the dutiful thing listens to my command, dropping to her knees on the soft fuzzy dark gray rug. She crosses her arms over her chest, scowling at me.

"Give me your phone," I instruct as I sit down in front of her, stretching my legs out in front of me on either side of her.

"Why?"

"Because I want to photograph you." I arch a brow. "How many times did you watch our movie from last night?"

"None, you pig," she snaps, her cheeks burning bright red.

"I jerked off this morning imagining you watching it." I lean forward, toying with a strand of her silky hair. "Your fingers got so sticky when you touched yourself."

Her nostrils flare with anger. "Picture is going to cost you. Videos are more."

"Name your price."

She chews thoughtfully on her bottom lip. "This is more than a selfie so it should cost more. Two hundred for each picture. For videos, it'll depend."

"What if I want a video of you fulfilling my fantasy? Of you fingering your tight, young, barely-touched cunt?"

She sucks in a sharp breath. "You can't afford that."

"Try me," I say, leaning forward until I'm close to her face. "If I want something badly enough, I'll pay for it."

"I thought you said . . ." She trails off and frowns. "The sex stuff was free."

I chuckle. "You want to play with your pussy for free? Then, by all means, have at it."

"No, asshole," she grumbles. "That it wasn't something on the table to negotiate with."

"Sucking my dick and fucking you are free. All the rest has a price."

"My hands aren't clean." She lifts her chin in a regal, bitchy way. "Sorry to disappoint."

"You can use my thigh."

She parts her pink pillow lips, and her hazel eyes dart back and forth, testing my seriousness. I don't joke when I'm negotiating.

"In my jeans?"

"Take them off."

She frowns, indecision warring on her face. "How much are we talking here?"

"How much do you want?"

"Ten thousand and my jeans stay on," she mumbles.

"And how much to get them off?"

She swallows hard and wrings her hands together. "Twenty?"

"You sound unsure . . ."

"Would you pay twenty for that?"

"Offer it, and I'll take it or leave it." I smirk at her, enjoying the flash of anger in her eyes. "Go on. Make me an offer, little girl."

"Twenty thousand to, um, ride your leg for five minutes without my jeans on. No pictures either. And, you can't touch me."

"What if I ask nicely?" I grin at her. "Does that earn me a hand on your tit?"

"No touching, freak. That's the deal."

"Take your pants off. I accept your deal."

Panic flashes in her eyes. It's cute to see the minnow swimming with sharks like she belongs. She rises to her feet, her hand trembling slightly as she unbuttons the top button on her jeans. I keep my stare on her hand as she unzips them slowly. She kicks off her sandals, her bare feet sinking into the plush rug.

"No touching," she reminds me. "You'll owe a thousand dollars if you accidentally do it."

"A deal's a deal."

This settles her, because she shimmies her jeans down her wide hips. This girl has one of those timeless hourglass figures the celebrity pinups used to have. Small, trim waist. A flare of her hips. Nice, thick enough thighs that taper down. And her tits are just the perfect size. A handful of reality, something I'm not at all used to coming from a world where money can buy anything, even the perfect body.

She pushes her jeans down and kicks them away. I drink in her perfect figure, settling at the tiny scrap of

black satin panties. With awkward, jerky movements, she makes her way toward me. I remain still with my hands on the sofa cushions beside me. She holds onto my shoulder as she straddles my thigh.

"This is going to be difficult," she complains.

"I'm sure you'll make it work." I smile at her. "Just ask if you need any assistance."

She flips me off, making me laugh, before settling herself on my thigh near my knee. "Time it," she snaps. "I'm not playing."

I pull my phone out of my shirt pocket since she never offered hers and then set the timer for five minutes, sitting it down next to me. She lets out a ragged sigh. Patiently, I wait for her to get started.

"Your pussy isn't going to rub itself," I remind her.

She huffs, clutching onto my other shoulder as she clumsily attempts to rub herself against my thigh.

"Eyes on me, remember?"

Hazel eyes lock on mine. At first, she's annoyed and frustrated. But the longer she's forced to stare at me, the more fluid her movements get. Her breathing quickens, and her hold on my shoulders tightens. Every

so often, she accidentally brushes up against my hard dick with her thigh, causing her to flame crimson.

"Feel good, pretty girl?"

She shrugs.

"Lie to me then. Tell me how good it feels and how happy you are for the privilege."

"It feels good," she grumbles. "I'm so happy."

"Liar."

She rolls her eyes. "It's weird. Sorry I'm not into it like you are."

"Would you rather me pin you down and dry fuck you on the rug?"

"W-What? No," she rushes out. "This is fine. It feels good."

"Or," I rumble, leaning forward to inhale her sweet cherry scent that lingers in her hair. "I could take your panties off and lick your pussy until you scream. That would feel much better."

A tiny gasp escapes her.

This girl likes dirty talk.

"Maybe I should shove my finger in your tight asshole while you ride my big cock. That would feel really good," I croon. "Teach you what a real dick feels like."

"Stop," she pleads.

"I'm only just getting started." I lean back, searing my gaze into hers. "When we fuck, it's going to hurt the first time, because I'm going to be desperate to come inside your barely-touched pussy. So much come will run out of you, you'll be cleaning it up for days. I won't allow you to wear panties so I can watch it run down your sexy thighs."

Her eyes flutter closed, and she whimpers. I don't remind her to open her eyes, but instead let her enjoy the moment.

"One day, I'm going to spread you out on my bed and see how many fingers you'll let me put inside you. If I lubed up my whole hand, would you let me fist your cunt, little girl? Would you scream because it hurts, or would you beg for all of it?"

Her body trembles, her nails biting into my shoulders. "Winston . . ."

She jerkily rides my thigh, desperate to come, but she needs help. I reach between her thighs and rub on her clit through her panties.

"I owe you a grand," I murmur and then kiss her neck. "Oops. Two."

She comes with a shriek of surprise. I delight in the way her body comes undone for me. I don't remove my finger that lazily teases circles on her clit until she smacks at my hand.

"I said don't touch," she snaps, her words breathless.

"And you still owe me another minute." I lift a brow in challenge. "Keep riding, cowgirl. Time's not up yet."

Her expression grows murderous, but she obeys. I know she won't get off again, at least not without help, and she has a determined look that says she'd rather throw herself out one of my windows than let me assist again. The second the timer goes off, she flies off me and quickly pulls her jeans back on. I rub my palm across the wet spot on my thigh before bringing my hand up to smell her arousal.

"Mmm." With my eyes glued to hers, I lick my palm. "Good, good girl."

"Where's your restroom?" she chokes out as she buttons her jeans.

I point to an open door. She scurries off, leaving me with an aching erection. While I wait for her to return, I send her the money we agreed upon.

"Holy shit," I hear her croak out in the bathroom.

And to think, I'm only getting started.

This girl has much to learn, and I'll enjoy every second of teaching her.

After twenty long minutes in the bathroom, she emerges, her self-confidence back in place. She waltzes over to me and pushes her feet into her shoes.

"I'm leaving now. I did my job." She crosses her arms over her chest. "We're done here."

I rise to my feet and prowl over to her. She's got balls. Unlike most women, she stands her ground and meets my stare with a fiery one of her own.

"I'm taking you home," I rumble.

"No."

"Not up for debate."

"I'll take an Uber."

My lip curls up in disgust. "Absolutely not."

"Fine, I'll walk," she huffs. "As long as I don't have to spend another second with you."

"No," I growl, gripping her delicate neck. "You will not walk. You're going to accept the ride, woman."

"I can afford my own ride now." She narrows her eyes at me. "I've just been paid."

"You're not spending your college money. Sorry, sweetheart."

"If I want to, I will," she barks back at me. "You don't get to dictate how I spend my money."

Her attitude is pissing me off. I release her to stride out of the living room to grab my keys from the entryway table. "I'll negotiate on a lot of shit, Ash, but not this. Let's go."

She's quiet the entire way down to the lobby. Ollie, my doorman, gives me a nod as we pass. Outside, the late spring air is warm and refreshing. The valet, Dave, brings my matte-black Lamborghini Urus to the front door.

I open the passenger door for her. She won't look at me, clearly pissed at having me take her home. I don't care. She can either take a ride from my driver or from me. I

won't have her riding in a fucking Uber. It's insulting. And it's not safe for her.

Once inside my vehicle, I fly out of the circular drive and onto the street.

"Plug your address into my GPS," I instruct.

She lets out an exaggerated sigh before leaning over to add it in. Once the robotic voice commands me where to go, I cut my eyes over to her. Her arms are crossed over her chest, and her phone is sitting between her thighs.

"Anytime you feel like sending a picture, I'll pay for them. Day or night."

"Seriously," she grumbles. "You're too much. I've had enough for tonight."

"Pity, because I have so much more to give."

She's quiet until we pull up in front of her brownstone. "Until when?"

"What do you mean?"

Her brows are furrowed. "Is this just a fun weekend thing for you?"

"No."

"So you plan to throw money at me for gross kinks for the rest of the foreseeable future?"

"Unless you have a better plan."

"Nope," she snaps. "Just ready for this to be over."

I study her for a long moment. "I won't stop until I've been inside you."

"And then you'll be done?" She narrows her eyes at me. "That simple?"

"Nothing is ever simple, Ash. I'll simply stop pursing you at that point, because then you'll be mine. You won't need to work then."

"Maybe I don't want to be yours. Maybe I want to work to earn a living and not be some old rich dude's plaything."

"We'll see," I say with a grin.

"Yeah, we will." She flings the door open and storms away.

I'm having the most fun I've had in years. There's no way in hell I'm going to let this one go anytime soon.

8

ASH

I flee from Winston's car like my ass is on fire. But, like the old phrase goes, "Out of the frying pan and into the fire." As his ridiculously expensive car drives away, I have to face the nutty triplets.

The music is loud and can be heard outside. I hope one of the neighbors rats them out. As stealthily as possible, I slip inside and rush to the stairs. In my haste, I slam into Sparrow.

I nearly gag at the stench of liquor on his breath.

These psychos are going to be raging alcoholics by the time they can legally drink.

"Excuse me," I grate out, moving past him.

Rushing up the stairs, I take them two at a time. I've almost made it to my room when Sparrow grips my arm, his strong fingers bruising into me.

"Ow," I yelp. "Let go of me!"

His laughter is dark and demonic, but thankfully he releases me. "I was trying to help, baby sister. But if you're going to be a bitch about it, whatever."

My brows furrow in confusion. "Help with what?"

"You'll see."

Fear chases away the confusion as I push into my room. The moment I see the open birdcage with no bird inside, I panic.

"Where's Shrimp?" I screech, spinning to face Sparrow. "Tell me!"

"You should ask Scout." He smirks at me. "You know he loves that bird."

He doesn't love my bird.

He loves terrorizing it.

I shove past Sparrow on a mission to find the bastard. The music and laughter are loud from the living room. I notice Sully is getting his dick sucked by some Pembroke Prep lacrosse groupie, but Scout is missing.

"Hey, sis," Sully calls out. "Carrie won't mind giving you a turn next."

I don't satisfy him with an answer as I run through the house looking for Shrimp. In Dad and Manda's room, I find Scout sprawled out on the bed in nothing but his black boxers, a joint in his mouth, one hand petting my bird.

"Hand him over, dickhead," I growl. "You know you're not allowed to mess with him."

"Says who?" he asks around the joint. "Your daddy? He's your father, not mine. I don't have to listen to jackshit he says."

I storm over to the bed, climb on, and walk on my knees toward him. "Give him to me."

Shrimp is strangely quiet, just like any time he's in Scout's presence. My heart hurts to see him so afraid. I try to take him from Scout, but his grip tightens. Tears well in my eyes as fear consumes me. He wouldn't hurt my bird, would he?

"Please," I beg, blinking back my emotion. "Please, Scout."

"Tell me where you were."

"At dinner with a friend." I swipe away a stray tear. "He's scared. Let me have him."

"What friend? I thought we told them all to stay away."

First Tate and now my friends? I'm too upset to be angry. Once I get my bird back, I'll rip them all new assholes.

"Sully said you had a boyfriend. That's not true, is it?" His dark eyes glint with madness. "Our baby sister isn't allowed to date."

"Not a boyfriend," I rush out. "A friend. Now please let him go."

He releases his hold on Shrimp, but before I can scoop him up, he flies to the ceiling fan, ruffling his feathers. Scout grabs me, yanking me to him. The joint falls from his lips onto the bed. I struggle in his arms, growling in frustration when I can't free myself. He rolls us until he has me pinned beneath his strong body. Terror wells up inside of me.

"Let me go," I spit out.

"Or what? You'll tell my mommy?"

I try to shove him away, but his strong hands grab my wrists and slam them to the mattress. My heart hammers in my chest as I realize I may not be safe with

him. His taunts and teases aren't just that. He wants to hurt me.

"We're going to fuck, Ash. And it's going to ruin our parents' marriage." He licks my cheek like a fucking dog. "Don't worry, baby sis, I'll make it really good for you. It'll be worth it when you're back to living in your shitty apartment with your loser dad."

I struggle to no avail. "Let me go or I'll destroy your life, Scout. Do not test me."

His eyes narrow as he studies me. I make sure to keep the venom in my glare. I'm not about to let this monster have sex with me just to cause a divorce between our parents.

"I better not find out this friend of yours is a boyfriend," he warns, his voice dropping to a menacing growl. "It'll only make your life worse." He glances at the ceiling fan. "I will stomp on that pretty little bird if I have to get that point across to you."

He climbs off me and saunters out of the room like he didn't just drop massive threats on me. I scramble to my feet and reach out for Shrimp. Now that Scout is gone, Shrimp chirps angrily at me.

"I know, buddy, I know. I'm so sorry. Come on."

After bitching me out in his birdy way, he finally flutters down into my open, waiting hands. Tonight, I'm barricading my door. I'll be damned if I let Scout or his brothers touch one hair on my head.

I take a quick shower and then coddle Shrimp until I'm sure he's forgiven me. Once I have him back in his cage with his blanket covering it so he'll feel safe, I dig the money out of my jeans pocket and hide the stash in my jewelry box. I take a peek at my phone, disappointed that Winston hasn't messaged me.

Why?

He's another version of the Terror Triplets.

A rich, strong man hellbent on doing whatever it takes to get his way.

Still, a pang of sadness hits me in the gut. I take a selfie and send it to him before I can think twice.

Me: A freebie.

His response is immediate.

Winston: What has you in such a giving mood? Was it that mind-altering orgasm I helped you obtain?

I roll my eyes at his stupid words.

Me: I wouldn't call it mind-altering . . .

Winston: That's because it wasn't my tongue.

Heat floods through me as I imagine just that.

Winston: You could earn more money, but it's going to require you to show a little skin.

Me: Perv.

Winston: A rich one.

Me: Tell me what you want, and I'll decide if I'll give it to you.

Winston: Got more of those candies?

I glance over at my giant jar of cherry Starburst, special ordered in that flavor only.

Me: Maybe . . .

Winston: Unwrap one and lick it.

Me: Okayyyyy.

Winston: Don't be a brat. Just do it.

I set my phone down and then grab a handful of Starburst. Once I'm settled on my bed, I unwrap one and lick it.

Me: Done. Now what?

Winston: So dutiful. Take your shirt off.

Me: Tell me everything you want first.

Winston: It's more than I can text.

Me: Then I'm probably too tired for it.

He doesn't reply for what feels like forever. Insecurity claws at my insides. I'm not exactly plaything material. Hell, I've barely had a boyfriend, much less a man. He probably has several girls he does this with, which for some reason, annoys the hell out of me.

An hour passes and I frown so hard at my phone, my head aches. I've gone through all but one of my Starbursts I grabbed.

What could Winston have possibly wanted me to do?

Several filthy images tease my mind. One of which I'm not ready to try. With a sigh of resignation, I peel off

my shirt and toss it. The cool air kisses my flesh, making my nipples pebble. I lie back, lick the Starburst, and then tease my hardened nipple with the wet side of the candy. Once my nipple has had enough attention, I smear the sticky wetness all over my breast. I rest the candy on top of my nipple, hiding it and then take a selfie. Just my breast and hair are in the picture. Before I think too hard, I send it.

Me: Good night.

He doesn't send me one hundred, he sends me five.

Winston: Good night indeed, my darling girl.

Me: Thank you. Oh, this is a freebie . . .

I send him a selfie of just my face this time, my red tongue sticking out.

He sends me five hundred more. It's both thrilling and stressful all at once. I almost feel bad for taking this man's money. Almost. I'm sure, at the end of this, I'll hate his guts. It'd be harder if I weren't so damn attracted to him. Something about him calls to me. I'm going to get myself in so deep with this fucked-up man.

After I clean myself up, I find I've missed a text from him. I nearly choke on my tongue when I see the

picture he sent. It's him, in his bed, shirtless and eyelids heavy with fatigue. His usual perfect hair is messy, and his smile is genuine—not one of his predator grins.

Before I think twice, I send him five hundred back.

Winston: What was that for?

Me: It's a good pic.

He doesn't respond after that. I feel like maybe I messed up by sending him money. Or maybe crossed a line I wasn't supposed to cross. At the end of the day, though, it's probably for the best. It was a good couple of days, and I made more money than some people make in half a year.

Tomorrow I'll look for a real job.

9

WINSTON

After my usual morning greetings, I stop at Deborah's desk. Her lips are pursed, and her eyes gleam with frustration. A typical Monday at Halcyon. She flutters her fingers toward the all-glass enclosed conference room. I follow her movement, biting back a groan to see my baby brother sitting at the head of the table, spinning in the chair like a child.

Fucking wonderful.

"This won't take long," I growl. "Push back my eight-fifteen to nine."

"I'm sorry, sir. He wouldn't take no for an answer."

"I'll deal with him."

Bypassing my office, I stalk over to the conference room and push open the door. It closes silently behind me. I walk over to the seat next to Perry and set my bag on top of the table.

"You know you need to schedule your meetings," I bite out, hoping to sting him with my icy words. "Some of us are busy bringing in the money for those who work feverishly to spend it."

His jaw clenches, and he crosses his arms over his chest. Outwardly, he's a man. Hell, he can probably bench more than me these days, but inside he's a brat. Perry might be twenty, but he's still the oops baby who stole too much of Dad's time when he had an empire to run.

"I can contribute," Perry argues. "When you start treating me like a part of this family."

"We're not doing this here." I crack my neck and stare at him with disdain. "What is the investment?"

"It shouldn't matter. It's *my* money." He scowls at me. "It doesn't have to be this difficult every time, Winston."

"If it weren't, you'd have bled your fund dry by the age of sixteen. There's a reason Dad made me the executor of your trust fund. Because I can keep a leash on you."

"Fuck off," he snaps. "Forget it. I'll get a loan then."

At this, I laugh, cruel and mocking. "That'll piss Mother off. Her sweet, golden child taking handouts. You know that's a shitty idea."

"It's not a handout. It's a loan. Or, better yet, I'll find investors."

"No one is going into business with a Constantine. We own them all already."

His eyes narrow. "Not all of them."

Sitting up in my chair, I thread my fingers together on the table and shoot him a murderous glare. "Who?"

"You know who."

"Indulge me, brother. Tell me who you'd get into bed with for a few hundred grand."

"Lucian Morelli."

My teeth grind together. It's one thing to taunt me, but it's a whole other thing to throw out that fucking family name.

"I'm sorry, but I think you've misspoken," I growl, giving him an opportunity to backtrack. This is the one bridge no Constantine can ever cross, and him even bringing it up is a slap in the face.

"Morelli has money, and if you won't give me mine, I'll borrow his until I turn of age." Perry flashes me a triumphant grin that reminds me of Dad whenever he'd financially end an opponent in a brutal way.

"You take one phone call with Lucian Morelli, and I will destroy you, Perry. Blood or not, you'll be gone. I'll ruin you in ways you'll never recover from. Mother will hate you. Our siblings will hate you. You might as well marry that bastard, because you'll be dead to the Constantine name." I slam my fist down on the table, making him flinch. "Have you forgotten his father killed ours?"

He lets out a huff. "Allegedly. There's no proof. It was an accident. For all we know, it was one of Dad's other enemies. Not every bad thing that comes our way comes from the . . ." He pauses, thinking twice about uttering their name again. "Them."

"You'll get your five hundred grand by lunchtime."

He relaxes some. "I wasn't really going to call him. I would never do that to Mother or to you. I know what they are. Really, Winston." He gives me an earnest look. "I wouldn't."

"I should hope not." I rub at the tension on the back of my neck. "I work tirelessly like Dad did to keep this

machine well-oiled and gushing money into our coffers. It's insulting for you to run to the enemy at the first sign of distress. Loyalty is absolutely important in our world. You have much to learn."

"Then teach me, Winny."

I cringe at the name he used to call me when he was a toddler. The same name he took to calling me at fifteen years old just after Dad was killed, when he'd sob and ask why God would take his daddy away.

"Winston," I correct, unable to meet his sad stare.

"Give me a job. Let me pull in a salary. I won't have to bleed my trust fund so much."

I scoff at his words. "You want to work here? You quit college last year. You're barely qualified for the mail room."

"Then let me work the mail room," he grumbles. "I can work my way up."

"A Constantine doesn't work the mail room," I snap. "It's embarrassing to our family name."

"There's something I can do. Just let me."

"What about your business venture?" I demand. "Suddenly not so important?"

"Not if I can work here."

I can't believe I'm about to agree to this.

"Associate economic intern," I concede begrudgingly. "You'd have to work with Nate a lot, but I could involve you in some of my projects. It's a paid internship for a year. I'll write in the contract you're not allowed to pursue any business ventures for the duration of the internship."

He grins, boyish and fucking goofy. "Seriously?"

"I'll only pay four hundred grand for the year." I lift a brow, waiting for him to argue.

Though he flinches slightly at the smaller amount, he doesn't argue.

"After the one-year internship, if you do a good job, we'll offer you a senior economic analyst position that pays three times your internship salary." I drum my fingers on the table. "Travel to London, Reykjavik, and Moscow will be required and expenses reimbursed. You'll be given a company car budget of five hundred grand and your own company-approved secretary. Do we have a deal?"

"Hell yeah!" He offers me his hand. "Thanks, Winny."

I shake his hand, irritated by the fact I've given this toddler a job. But it sure beats the alternative of him getting himself into trouble out of boredom, especially with the Morellis. At least by him working here, I can keep an eye on the reprobate.

"Have Deborah call my tailor. Whoever you use, frankly sucks. If you work here, you have to look the part." I rise from my seat and grab my bag. "Don't let me down."

"I won't," he vows.

At least *he* seems to believe his words.

It's nearing five, and I'm agitated beyond words. Meeting after motherfucking meeting today, all of which I've had to lash out and threaten each person. I'm on edge and tense as hell. To make matters worse, Perry has popped into my office no less than fifty times to ask questions. I know Nate gets off on this shit. He enjoys the hell out of seeing me frazzled.

I'm so over it.

And I didn't even get to play, not once today.

My thoughts drift to Saturday night. I'd been surprised at how far Ash went with me. She may be a shitty maid, but she was born for this job. To please me. My dick twitches at the reminder of her riding my thigh and the way she whimpered when she came. I thought she needed space after that, especially after our argument afterward, but then she shocked me again by texting me.

Now that I can take a fucking breather, I text her.

Me: I want you to become my full-time house maid.

Ash: Is that all?

The sarcasm drips in her text, making me smile for the first time today.

Me: Among other things. Name your price.

Ash: Your place is immaculate, Win. You don't need me.

Me: Incorrect. I need you available at all times. We both know calling you a maid is a ruse and a way to get Harold off my back later when he discovers how much money I pay you.

Ash: Harold sounds like a real hardass.

Me: Most accountants are.

Ash: You seriously want to pay me to hang out in your condo all day waiting for you to come home like a sugar baby?

Me: When you talk dirty, my dick gets so fucking hard.

Ash: Gross. I'm not talking dirty!

Me: But you could, and I'd pay handsomely for it.

Ash: I'm not in the mood today.

Me: To talk dirty?

Ash: To talk to you period.

I smirk at her response. Testy.

Me: Name your price so we can agree and move on.

Ash: My bird comes with me.

Her fucking what?

Me: Is this teenage slang for your friend? Because I only want you.

Ash: No, my friends all got scared off by the Terror Triplets. I'm talking about my bird. A real one. His name is Shrimp. He's a good boy.

This girl is serious.

Me: Send me a picture. If I like it, I'll pay you for it.

Seconds later, she sends me a selfie with her and a goddamn pink bird. Her smile is broad and happy as she looks at it. Fuck me. I hate animals. But I don't hate how pretty she is, and I certainly don't hate that smile. I shoot her a hundred bucks.

Me: Fine. Bird can come.

Ash: His name is Shrimp.

Me: Shrimp is welcome. Now let's negotiate your salary.

The dots move for a bit as she no doubt considers what her pay would be. When she replies, I'm confused by her answer.

Ash: Fifteen an hour is what I made at FGM Services. I guess that will suffice since I'm not exactly the best maid.

No wonder she didn't do shit. I'd laugh in someone's fucking face if they offered me fifteen an hour to clean. Fuck that.

Me: Fifteen hundred a day, five days a week. I want you at my home from eight to five during the work week.

Ash: WINSTON, NO!

Me: I don't hear that phrase often, little girl . . .

Ash: You're not paying me thirty grand a month to sit and play with my bird all day!

I can imagine her plump lips parted in shock. It makes me want to rush to her place, kidnap her, and lock her away in my condo forever so I can keep that scandalized look on her face always.

Me: Take it or leave it.

Ash: Leave it. I'm not accepting those terms.

Me: That's just the base pay. All the "odd" jobs I'll request of you are in addition to that salary.

Ash: Why are you so difficult?

Me: It's really quite easy, Cinderelliott.

Ash: Don't call me that.

Me: You're about to become my maid. I think it's fitting.

Ash: You're not Prince Charming, for the record.

Me: No, I'm the villain in our story. Now accept my terms, woman.

Ash: Can I leave Shrimp at night and on the weekends? I can come feed him and play with him. You can deduct that money from my pay.

I frown at her strange request.

Me: I'm not good with animals.

My phone rings, and I lift a brow to see that she's Face Timing me. With a quick swipe, I accept the call, drinking in her young, pouty lips.

"Please, Win. He doesn't feel safe here." Her brows scrunch, and she chews on her bottom lip as she awaits my answer.

"I get to kiss you," I offer. "Take it or leave it."

"I'll take it." She beams at me, her hazel eyes lighting up. "Thank you!"

We didn't settle on a number, which means I get as many as I want.

"Deal. I'll watch the bird for you as long as I get to kiss you."

Someone knocks on my office door, making me scowl in frustration.

"I'll call you later to finish this discussion," I vow. "I have a visitor."

"Bye." She wriggles her fingers at me and then the screen goes blank.

"Come in," I bark out, seriously peeved at whoever interrupted me.

If it's Perry one more time . . .

"Your panties are in a major wad today," Nate says as he strolls in. "Care to share what's eating you?"

I lean back in my chair, glowering at him. "I don't know. Maybe it's the fact you sent Perry in here a thousand goddamn times to annoy the shit out of me."

He barks out a laugh as he sits down in the chair across from me, making himself at home. "You hired him to intern. Interns must learn. It's the way of the world, man."

"I'm regretting my decision, and it's only been one day."

"Sounds like you need a night out. Let's go for drinks. My treat." His face quirks up in a devious grin. "We could show Perry what it means to be a real man."

At this, I scoff. "That shit isn't learned after a day."

"No, but it'll be funny to give him shit. Watch his face turn beet-red. When Deborah yelled at him earlier, he blushed so fucking hard." He cackles. "Maybe he's into older women."

I may dislike Perry most days, but I'm pissed that Deborah yelled at him. He's a fucking Constantine. I'll deal with her later.

"Fine." I pick up my laptop and shove it into my bag.

"Fine? Seriously? I usually have to beg a little more to get you out."

"I just hired my maid full time and would like to celebrate with her. Let me know where we're going, and I'll meet you there." I zip up my bag and lift a brow at him. "Stop staring at me like I've lost my mind."

"I mean, she's hot as fuck, but since when do you fraternize with the help?"

"When she's not cleaning my place, she also works as my personal assistant." A small lie, but one I'll no doubt turn to truth soon.

"Does she suck your dick too? Again, how do I get me one of those?"

"No," I grind out. "She doesn't. I pay her to do a job, and she does it well." To please me. That's her job.

"So sensitive today. You're such a little bitch when you have to financially maim people. If you weren't such a money hungry slut, I'd say you hate doing it."

"Bye, Nate. Send Deborah in on your way out. Tell Perry to wear something respectable."

"Aye aye, Captain." He mock salutes. Fucking child is what he is. "I'll text you the place later."

As soon as he leaves, I shoot a text to Ash.

Me: I'll pay you two thousand for every event, dinner, or meetup you attend with me. Clothes, shoes, and accessories are also included. Say yes, and I'll see about hiring a personal shopper for you. Choose something short, tight, and sexy for tonight. I need your shoe size. I'll be providing those.

Ash: Slow your roll. How often are these events?

Me: As needed. Tonight, you're needed. Shoe size, woman.

Ash: 7 and we have to drop Shrimp off at your place first.

Me: I'll send a car to pick you up and bring you to my condo. And if anyone asks, you're my maid during the day and my personal assistant at night.

Ash: This is going to get messy, Win.

Me: Good thing I have a maid to clean it all up.

Ash: What if I embarrass you?

Me: I'm hoping for you to only embarrass yourself.

Ash: Special requests at these events will cost you. Embarrassing me is a very special request.

Me: All you have to do is name your price, Cinderelliott, and it's yours. Be ready to head my way in an hour.

After confirmation that she'll do as requested, I finally give my secretary who's standing primly by my door my attention.

"We need to discuss the way you speak to a Constantine, Deborah," I growl. "Shut the door."

The tears begin to fall before she even gets the door closed.

They won't work. I'm unaffected by tears. All that will get her out of trouble now is a heartfelt apology and a vow to never do it again. By the time I finish ripping her a new asshole with my vicious words, she's docile and eager to show she'll behave.

"Oh," I say before she scurries out of my office. "Hire me a personal shopper. I'll need her to measure my

new personal assistant. Make this your priority, and send them to my condo first thing in the morning."

"Yes, sir," Deborah murmurs, her face splotchy from crying.

"Good girl. Don't disappoint me again."

She shakes her head in vehemence, sending more tears skating down. "Never again, sir."

10

ASH

"We're totally doing this," I tell Shrimp as I cap my matte-red lipstick. "I'm nervous, but this is for the best. You'll be safe there. It's quiet and huge. More space to fly."

Shrimp titters and purrs in his birdy way as though he likes the idea.

Tonight, my hair is down and in loose, beach waves that hang just past my breasts. I actually put on makeup and made an effort. Winston craves to humiliate me for sport, but I refuse to let it be because of my looks while we're out. I can dress up and be his arm candy for the night. Rather than put on the dress that'll draw the eyes of my wicked stepbrothers and questions from my dad and Manda, I pull on a pair of denim shorts, slide into my brown flip flops, and opt for a

black tank top. I've already packed my backpack with my undergarments that go with my black dress as well as the accessories to match. I even grab a pair of flats in case he chooses shoes that are too high to walk in.

Knowing Winston, that's exactly what he'll choose.

Once he sees how horribly uncoordinated I am in heels, he'll gladly let me wear the flats instead.

I grab my garment bag, my backpack, and Shrimp's cage. He whistles loudly, eager to go on an adventure. I make it down the stairs without an event and almost to the front door before Manda stops me.

"Where are you going out to, young lady? I thought you had work tonight?" I turn to find her staring at me with shrewd eyes. Her arms are crossed over her too-perfect tits, and her plump lips are pursed. I wonder who performs the plastic surgery on the plastic surgeon.

"I have a work thing." I shrug. "I'll be out late."

She eyes Shrimp with a curled lip. "I seriously doubt FGM Services allows you to bring your bird."

"I, uh, I . . ." I trail off wondering how to break this to her. "I don't work for them anymore."

"You didn't get fired already, did you?" she demands. "I told you not to embarrass me!"

The way her face turns purple would be entertaining, except that she reminds me of Scout when she does it, and he scares the shit out of me.

"I didn't embarrass you," I respond in a rush. "In fact, you would be proud. I got recruited for a better job."

Her eyebrows fly to her hairline. "Oh?"

"Mr. Constantine thought I did such a good job, he's hired me to clean his apartment full time." I lift my chin, forcing false confidence into my words. "I'm also to assist him some and attend events with him."

She goes from pissed to shocked. Then, her brown eyes glint in the predatory way all three of her sons' do. "Which Constantine, love?"

Love?

Ack.

"Um, Winston."

She gasps, her lashes fluttering. "CEO of Halcyon. *That* Constantine?"

"Yeah. Is that bad?"

"Heavens no, sweetie. That's wonderful."

Sweetie?

Gross.

"Great. I'm going to go now. He's sending a car to pick me up."

She clacks my way, her heels echoing loudly at her approach. Much like my mother used to, she strokes my hair in an affectionate way. "I don't think I have to explain to you what an important job this is. The Constantines are an extremely difficult family to get in with. This position you've somehow procured elevates our family status. It's imperative you don't mess this up for us."

Don't worry, Manda the Maneater, I'm a pro at gagging on breadsticks, just like the boss man loves.

"I'll do my best," I grumble.

She inspects me closely, no doubt cataloging all my imperfections as though she might get to fix them one day. "See Erin at the spa as soon as possible. Tell her to give you the full treatment and to put it on my tab."

No, thank you, lady.

"I'll check my schedule. Mr. Constantine is very demanding of my time."

Her brown eyes gleam with hunger. "That's fabulous, love. Demanding means he enjoys the work you do for him. Perhaps a romance could brew. If not with the eldest Constantine, there's always the younger ones. Maybe Perry. He's quite a looker himself and near your age. See this as an opportunity for your future. At this rate, you won't even need college."

I'd love to tell her I'm not some gold digger after the Constantine treasure, but that's a total lie. He pays me for strange things, and I gladly take his money.

"What about college?" Dad's voice booms as he enters the foyer from the living room.

He's polished and put together wearing an expensive suit I've never seen on him before. The grays at his temples have been dyed to match the chocolate brown on the rest of his head, and he now has a neat, trim beard, because Manda likes him with a little facial hair. Some days, I don't recognize this version of my father.

"We were discussing," Manda purrs as she steps into his arms and grins up at him, "how successful Ash will be no matter what avenue she takes for her career."

Dad smiles at me, the corners of his eyes crinkling in an old, familiar way that makes my chest squeeze. "That's my girl."

I glance out the window, noticing a sleek black Mercedes waiting. "Oh, that's my ride. Talk soon." I give Dad a quick kiss on the cheek before rushing out the door.

Manda follows me out of the house, practically thrumming with excitement. I'm aggravated at how she's suddenly my best friend. I suppose if I'm in good with the Constantines, Manda will become more popular within the elite crowd by default. I always knew she was a status climber, which surprised the hell out of me when she started dating my father.

He was poor in her eyes.

Unworthy.

A single father.

I cringe to think it could be true love. Dad only truly loved Mom. There's no way he can love Manda. I think she decided to slum it because Dad is incredibly handsome. Most rich guys are dweebs. Aside from Winston, I haven't seen too many hot rich men.

"Good evening, miss," a suited man greets when I approach the Mercedes.

He loads my things into the trunk and then sits Shrimp's birdcage in the backseat. I climb up front with the man rather than in the back. I notice the flash of displeasure on his face, but he doesn't argue. The ride over to Winston's is introspective as I wonder if I've just willingly crawled into the alligator's mouth. Only time will tell.

I pace the guest room, checking the time again. When I'd agreed to meet here and go out with Winston, I didn't realize that meant waiting until nine in the evening. Francis brought me dinner, and I ate alone. The loneliness annoys me.

Maybe Winston will be a no-show. I can take off this dress, wash off my makeup, and go home.

Shrimp sings at the top of his lungs from the living room. He loves the giant windows and has taken to flying back and forth in the huge space, only stopping to rest occasionally on the massive light fixture.

I rush into the living room, interested to see what has him in such a tizzy. As soon as I enter the room, I know

exactly why.

Winston Constantine.

He stands under his light, staring up at Shrimp, shaking his head. Apprehension crawls down my spine. I don't like that he seems unhappy already about Shrimp.

"He doesn't get to fly around much," I explain. "He'll calm down. He's just really happy."

Winston turns, his eyes narrowing as he takes in my appearance. He prowls my way, deadly intent gleaming in his dark blue eyes. I have to crane my neck up to look at him when he stops so close our chests nearly touch.

"You smell good," he rumbles, his hand coming up to tug at a strand of my hair.

"So do you."

His gaze softens as he roams it down to my lips. "That red is dangerous."

"Don't worry. I'm about to wash it off since our thing is obviously canceled."

He grips my jaw, stopping me from moving away. His lips descend on mine and he kisses them in a chaste

way that has me yearning for more.

"It's not canceled. We're meeting my friend Nate and brother Perry soon. Did you eat?"

"Francis fed me."

"I left the shoes on the entryway table. Put them on while I change. We'll leave in five minutes."

He stalks away, climbing the stairs like a beast trying to get into heaven. I stare a little too long at his ass before I rush over to the table to swap out my shoes. As soon as I open the shoebox, I cringe.

I love Aquazzura as much as the next girl but buying me a twelve-hundred-dollar pair of spiked heels is overboard. Not to mention, there's no way I can walk in these shoes. I'm dazzled by the pretty crystal embellishments, though, so I'll at least try them on. I kick off my flats and then slide on one shoe. It barely hugs my foot, and the heel is tall enough to be lethal. I step into the other shoe, holding onto the entryway table to keep from falling.

And yet . . . I still wobble.

I take a cautious step forward, clutching the table, only to nearly roll my ankle. Such a shame because they really are pretty and match my dress. I'm about

to kick them off when two strong hands grip my waist.

"They're perfect," Winston rumbles, his hot breath tickling my hair. "You're almost as tall as me now."

I suppress a shiver at his touch. "Sorry to break the bad news, but I can't walk in them."

He chuckles, dark and menacing. "Which is exactly why I bought them."

"What?" I hiss, craning my neck to see his face. "Why would you do that?"

"I thought you wanted to earn money. You know how hard my dick gets when you're embarrassed."

Anger surges through me, hot and violent. "Seriously?"

"Deadly."

"This won't just embarrass me," I snap. "It'll embarrass you too. How will people take it seriously that I'm your assistant if I can't even walk in heels?"

"You'll just have to stay close." He releases my hips to offer his elbow. "Why don't we take a few practice steps?"

"Unbelievable. This is going to cost you, Constantine. Big time."

"How about I'll pay you a hundred bucks any time you almost fall?"

"Two," I snarl. "And if I do fall, that's a thousand coming out of your pocket."

"I can afford it."

"I hate you."

"No, you're angry with me, but you secretly like it. You like knowing that each time you wobble tonight and your pretty cheeks turn pink, my dick will be hard as stone."

My skin burns, and it infuriates me that he's right. He's creating a monster. I don't like the person I'm learning is hiding inside me. She's a fucking freak like him.

"Come, darling, let's take these shoes for a test run." He grins at me in his ruthless psychopath way.

I latch onto his elbow, cursing him as I take a shaky step. I'm forced to hold onto him for dear life. It reminds me of the first time Dad took me ice skating. I'd only been able to stay upright if he were holding onto me. This is mortifying.

A whole night of this?

No way.

"We bring my flats as backup," I throw out. "Take it or leave it."

"Leave it. You can bring your flats as backup, but if you put them on, you'll forfeit all the shoe humiliation money you've earned." I wobble, clinging to him, and he laughs. "Two hundred dollars right there that you'd lose out on."

Considering I quaver just about every step, this night is going to be ridiculously expensive for him. Stupid rich man with too much money. Most guys buy a yacht or a fucking island. My guy buys dumb shoes to watch me walk around like a baby deer on ice.

My guy?

New fury courses through me. He's my boss. Nothing more. Sure, he gave me an orgasm. Sure, he makes my blood heat when he touches me. Sure, I enjoyed the kiss. But at the end of the day, he's an asshole.

I need to remember it, too.

"Let's go," I grumble. "Time to make a damn fool out of myself."

"I'm positively thrilled about it."

The only response he gets is my middle finger in his face.

11

WINSTON

It's cute as fuck to hear her add to the total I owe her every time she nearly falls. I'm already out forty-eight hundred and we've barely made it inside the club Nate wanted to meet at. With people now watching, Ash clings to me tighter and focuses harder on staying upright.

"They have a VIP booth," I say over the music. "This way."

I guide her over to the table, catching her before she busts her ass and costs me a grand. She shoots me a murderous expression that has me chuckling. As soon as Nate and Perry look our way, possessiveness tightens its grip on me.

She's hot.

I know this.

I just don't like seeing the fact that they know this too.

"Nate, Perry," I greet, nodding at them both. "This is my new assistant, Ash Elliott."

Perry grins at her and pats the spot next to him. "Nice to meet you. Sit. I won't bite."

He won't bite because I'd rip his teeth out one by one if he even tried. Rather than threaten my baby brother, I steel my features and assist Ash into the booth. Nate watches with amusement gleaming in his eyes. Once she's seated, I scoot in beside her.

"I ordered a round," Nate says as the waitress drops off four beers and eight shots.

I knock back my first shot, eager to numb some of this jealous rage burning inside me. The alcohol calms me, and I gulp down my other shot right after. When I glance up, Nate is smirking at me. Fucking prick.

"So we're both newbies," Perry says to Ash. "We both have to work for this tyrant."

She laughs. A genuine laugh. For my brother.

"At least he pays well," she replies, flashing me a saucy grin that makes my dick harden instantly.

Perry starts asking her a million questions about her age and where she lives and whatever else he can ramble on about. All I seem to focus on is the way he checks her out every three seconds. And when I look over at Nate to complain, he's doing much of the same.

I get it.

She's shiny and young and mesmerizing.

But they can find their own goddamn toy.

Nate asks Perry something, stealing his attention. I lean in, brushing my lips against Ash's ear. "Five thousand for your panties."

She turns to look at me, a warning glinting in her stare. It's cute that she thinks she gets a break from our games.

"Take them off now. Be discreet. Don't let them see what you're doing, or they'll only want you more. Those fuckers already think they have a chance with you, but you're mine, little girl. I want your panties off and in my pocket within five minutes."

"Fine," she hisses.

Perry starts talking to her again which means she's ignoring me. But I focus on every shift and movement. She's trying to be subtle, but both Perry and Nate are

distracted by her fidgeting. To help her out, I ask Nate about his newest acquisition and Perry's part in it. While they animatedly discuss it, Ash pushes her dress up her thighs. I'm crowding her so I have up-close access to peer down between her and the table to see what she's up to. The moment her hand disappears underneath, I have the urge to whip my dick out and impale her on it.

The table goes quiet, all three of us focused on Ash. She starts rambling about Columbia University, but no one is listening. We're all watching as she squirms, trying hard to get her panties off.

"Need some help?" I ask against her ear, running my palm up her bare thigh. "I could assist."

She shudders when I tease my finger along the edge of her panty line under her dress. I hook my finger under the flimsy string at her hip, tugging it down. I have to pull it roughly to get one side off her ass and to her thigh. Reaching over, I do the same for the other side. Once her panties are sitting at her upper thighs, I run my fingers on the inside, pleased as fuck to feel the wetness there.

"You may continue," I rumble.

She straightens her dress to keep herself covered and then she pulls the material toward her knees. Nate is grinning, but Perry looks like he might ask her to marry him. Fucking chump.

The rest of her task is smooth sailing. As soon as she has them fisted in her hand, she shoves them against my crotch. I groan at her touch on my dick.

"There. Happy?"

"Elated."

She sticks her tongue out at me and then proceeds to ask Nate about his position at Halcyon. I bring the black panties up to my nose and inhale her sweet, sexy scent before pocketing the material. Nate simply shakes his head, stifling a laugh. Perry is too busy staring at Ash like God dropped an angel beside him and told him it was a gift.

Over my dead fucking body.

"Want to dance?" Perry asks Ash.

She shakes her head in vehemence. "I can't."

Both Nate and Perry look at me in question.

"She can dance," I say in a smooth, unaffected tone. "I must warn you, though. She has two left feet. Your funeral."

Perry shrugs. "Can't be half as bad as the people dancing here."

"Whatever, man."

Ash shakes her head at me as crimson paints her cheeks. She doesn't want to dance because she can barely walk in her shoes. It'll please me to watch her make a fool out of herself. Maybe then these fuckers will stop looking at her like she's the Queen of motherfucking England.

I slide out of the booth and offer my hand. She eyes it like it's a snake, huffing in irritation as she makes her way out. When she wobbles upon standing, she smacks at me the moment I try to assist. Perry, the real Prince Charming around here, comes to her rescue. With eyes filled with venom for me, she takes his offered arm. They make their way to the dance floor, and my eyes track them the entire way.

"Someone's in love," Nate says, cackling like a bitch.

"Fuck off, douchebag. I'm not in love."

"You just made your assistant take her panties off in front of us. She has you by the balls, man." He grins like an idiot, clearly enjoying this.

"She's my assistant. She does what I say. Mind your own business."

"Perry has his hands all over her," Nate tattles. "Are you going to beat his ass? I always wanted to see two Constantines fight."

I flip him the bird, darting my gaze over to Perry. He's dancing with Ash, but nothing too crazy. Nate's just trying to rile me up.

"My brother is enamored with her. So are you. She's pretty, I get it."

"Enamored? Your brother looks like he's planning his wedding proposal. I, on the other hand, wouldn't mind taking her for a ride on my dick. We both know your old ass can't satisfy a young thing like her."

Though he's joking, I don't miss the edge in his voice. He really does want to fuck Ash. I'd cut his dick off if he tried. As long as I pay Ash's bills, no one is fucking her. No one.

"Oh look," Nate says. "She's dancing with another chick. Maybe she's into women."

I narrow my eyes, annoyed at the fact Perry is dancing with two girls who aren't Ash. She's smiling and not falling on her ass, so I leave it be for the time being.

"You trying to taunt me won't work," I say, meeting his stare. "May as well cut the shit now."

He concedes and launches into another project he's working on. I'm only half listening. My mind is on other things. Like the panties in my pocket.

"Holy shit," Nate barks out. "She's dancing with a Morelli."

"Nice try."

"Man, look." He points toward the dance floor.

Leo fucking Morelli and his entourage are crowded around my girl, keeping Perry away from her while Leo grinds on her ass from behind.

Hell to the motherfucking no.

I fly out of the booth, unable to control the rage blazing through me like an inferno. Nate calls after me, but I'm a man on a mission. I shove between two of Morelli's guys, stalking right up to Ash.

"Time to go, Miss Elliott," I bark out. "Now."

Her smile falls, and her eyes grow wide. She must sense the tension rolling between Leo and me, because she starts to pull away. His fingers bite into her waist as he challenges me with a dark glare.

"Interesting seeing a Constantine slumming it around here," Leo says, his face twisted into a sneer. "Just wait until I tell my brother. Lucian quite enjoys learning of chinks in the Constantine golden armor."

"Let go of my assistant," I grit out in my calmest tone. "She has work to do."

"Is that what you're calling your girlfriend?" He shakes his head, nuzzling her hair with his nose. "I'm not an idiot, Constantine. I've watched you with her all night. She's important to you, which means she's important to the Morellis."

Grabbing Ash's hand, I drag her from his grip and into my arms. The move sends her stumbling. I don't take satisfaction in her embarrassment. I'm more worried about her life at this point. We've royally fucked up. This was a mistake.

"Miss Elliott is an asset to my company," I snarl. "And you know we don't take kindly to our assets being threatened. It's best you find something else to fixate on, Morelli."

His grin is vicious. "Too late. I'm all kinds of fixated on your new whore."

"Let's go," Ash murmurs, clinging to my chest. "Please."

Leo Morelli won't hesitate to spread terrible rumors about Ash that would make her life a living hell. That's the shallow end of the spectrum. He's capable of far, far worse than errant words. And the deeper it cuts Ash, the more he'll enjoy it. He knows the Constantine family is off limits. If he did that to one of my sisters, we'd retaliate so hard he'd see stars. But how can I protect Ash when we're only temporary? I want to fuck her, not ruin her life. If that means I need to set aside some of my pride, so be it.

Sliding a possessive hand to palm her ass, I meet Leo's stare with a hard one of my own. "Perhaps we can agree on a sum to make you *un*-fixate."

His dark eyes narrow. "That will take some thought and consideration. I'll need to evaluate the worth of such a deal. Until then, you have my word my lips are sealed until we come to agreement." He steps closer, cocking his head to the side. "Should I contact your lovely assistant to arrange the meeting later?"

"You may call my secretary Deborah and set it up," I growl. "Don't fuck with me, Morelli. It won't end well."

"Don't worry," Leo says with a wolfish grin. "I don't want to steal your girl. I like 'em older. How's your mother anyway?"

Perry decides to show up. Fucking momma's boy.

"What's it to you, asshole?" Perry demands, bowing up like he could actually kick Leo Morelli's ass. Unbelievable.

Luckily, Leo is amused. If it were Lucian, I'd be picking pieces of Perry's skull out of my hair.

"My father says hi is all," Leo states with a laugh. "Caroline must be so lonely these days since your father is gone." He scratches his chin as if he's trying to remember something. "How did he die again?"

Nate, who approached at some point, grabs Perry before he tries to tackle Leo. Morelli and his gang of thugs turn, ending our conversation and dispersing like the fucking shadows they are.

"Time to go home." I give Ash's ass a pat. "I'm tired."

She tilts her head up to meet my stare. "I'm sorry. I didn't know."

As frustrating as it is that I'm going to have to pay Leo an ungodly amount of money to keep him off Ash because she doesn't know the politics of this town, I don't take it out on her. Her naivety of our family name, and consequently the Morellis, is one of the things that has me so enamored with her.

"I know," I grumble. "Don't worry about Leo Morelli." I smirk at her. "You have bigger worries like how to exit this club without falling and showing everyone your naked pussy."

Her worry transforms into irritation. "I hate you, Win."

" Trust me, that's better than love, Cinderelliott."

Loving a Constantine will get you killed.

12

ASH

I screwed up tonight, and it's all Winston's fault. I'd been so mad at him for being a dick at the table, but I actually enjoyed dancing. Perry is nice and funny. He's the exact opposite of Winston. Not that I'd ever date someone like Perry. I prefer the fucked-up ones, it would seem. Because when Winston helped take my panties off, I wanted to beg him to touch me. I'd been so turned on that we were putting on a show that I nearly let him have his way with me.

A freebie.

Everything went to hell, though, the minute the hot Italian-looking guy started dancing with me. He gave off the same superior vibes as Winston. In a way, dancing with him felt like being with Winston. The alcohol had me flushing when I'd felt Leo's dick hard

and rubbing into me from behind. At first, when I saw Winston flying at us with murderous rage in his gaze, I thought it was intended for me. But the second he addressed Leo, I realized I was caught in the middle of a war I knew nothing about, only that I had unknowingly danced my way to the other side.

Money.

It's the weapon Winston wields.

Sharp and powerful.

I'd watched him sling it through the air, saving me from an unknown monster. The promise was in his hard stare. A shit ton of money was going to be tossed at Leo Morelli. Because of me. I'm smart enough to realize now that Leo sees me as something Winston cares about. Something Leo could use against him. And Winston was ready to negotiate a big-ass deal to protect me.

It's so fucked up, but I'm grateful.

Winston may be a total dick most days, but he showed no weakness when it counted.

"Are you sure you don't want me to come home with you?" I murmur, hating how needy I sound.

He pulls up in front of our brownstone and puts his vehicle in park before glancing my way. "Positive."

Ouch.

His words sting, but I can tell he's stressed out. I feel guilty for bringing this new headache into his world.

"Okay," I choke out. "I'll see you in the morning. Shrimp has food and water in his cage. If you cover it with the blanket when you go to bed, he'll be quiet."

"Good night, Ash."

Tears burn at my eyes, which pisses me off. I grab my phone out of the cupholder and fling open the door. I've barely managed to make it to the front door before my phone buzzes, money being sent.

Normally, seeing my account grow is gratifying.

Tonight, it just makes me sick to my stomach.

I stare after his taillights, hurt and frustrated. I'm not equipped to handle a man like Winston Constantine. He's too much . . . everything. I'm way out of my depth.

"Not a boyfriend, huh?"

Scout emerges from the shadows, an unreadable expression on his face. He's dressed all in black. I don't know what he's been up to or what he plans on doing, I

just know I don't want any part of it. Twisting the knob, I let out an exasperated huff that it's locked. He shoves his hand into his pocket and prowls up the steps. I tense up when he crowds me from behind.

"You never dressed up like this for Tate," he murmurs, his tone menacing. "And I'm supposed to believe the guy who dropped you off in a fucking Lamborghini isn't tapping this." He squeezes my ass.

I try to push him away, but he's taller and stronger, easily pinning my front to the door. My heart races inside my chest as I worry what he'll do, but then he unlocks the door. Slipping out of his hold, I rush toward the stairs. The stupid shoes slow me down. I make it up three steps before he's on me. When I open my mouth to scream, he covers it with one hand and wraps an arm around me to pick me up. My shoes fall off as I kick out, not making purchase with anything as he easily carries me upstairs.

I manage to hit him in the head with my phone, causing him to grunt in pain and release me. My heart is in my throat as I run to my room. The door barely closes before he's shoving his way inside. I throw my phone at him which he easily swats away.

"Stay away from me!" I shriek. "I'll call for Dad."

"He can't hear you downstairs," he sneers. "Looks like it's just you and me, sis."

I try to dart past him toward the bathroom, but he's faster, shoving his way in with me.

"Please don't," I beg, tears streaming down my cheeks. "Please, Scout. Please don't hurt me."

"Take your dress off."

"No!"

He reaches into his pocket, withdrawing a pocketknife. Flipping it open, he tests the blade on his thumb, drawing blood.

"All I want is for you to wash his scent off, Ash. Don't make this harder than it has to be."

"He's not my boyfriend," I sob. "I swear."

"Take your fucking dress off or I'll cut it the fuck off."

I inch back, trembling. "O-Okay. I'm doing it."

He reaches inside the shower and turns the water on, his sharp glare never leaving me. I shakily unzip the dress. Before it falls away, I hold it to me, pleading with my eyes. All it takes is a gesture with his knife to have me dropping it to the floor. His jaw clenches when he finds me without panties.

"I fucking knew it. I told Sully and Sparrow, and they didn't believe me."

"I didn't sleep with him," I choke out. "The dress would show panty lines. Believe me, Scout. Please."

He studies me for a beat. "Take your bra off."

Quickly, I yank it off, standing completely nude for him.

"Get in and wash that whore makeup off your face." He points at the shower. "That's what you are, Ash. Some rich man's whore. They don't fuck pretty girls for love. No, they do it because it's fun and interesting. May as well face the fact that you can't get anywhere in this world."

I have no words. All I can do is hug my middle and cry. He makes another terrifying gesture with his knife, sending me scurrying under the spray. I hurry to wash my face and hair, hoping he'll leave. His stare never leaves my body.

He opens the door and steps in fully clothed. I whimper, trying to run from him, but his knife presses into my throat. I know Scout. He'll use it in a heartbeat. He's psychotic. I freeze, trembling when he cups my breast. His dick is hard, pressed against my backside.

"Please don't," I beg.

His hand drifts down to cup my pussy. "Tell me who you belong to, and I'll think about it."

"You," I blurt out without hesitation. "I belong to you."

"Wrong answer."

I cry out when he rubs at my clit in a rough way. I'm terrified, but my body doesn't get the memo. Every nerve ending responds to his touch. It makes me cry harder.

"You belong to the Mannford triplets. All three of us. Ours to fuck with. Ours to destroy."

I nod because I don't know what else he wants. I'm afraid he'll cut my throat. Thankfully, he pulls the knife away, flipping it closed and pocketing it again. He grips my breast with one hand while he rubs at my clit with the other. I'm disgusted when stars glitter around me. A moan escapes my throat, coating me in shame.

"See," Scout says, slowly sliding his finger from my clit to gently press inside me. "That wasn't so hard. Got you nice and wet too." He bites my shoulder hard enough I shriek out in pain. "Don't worry, sis. When I fuck you, my brothers will be there to take their turn. A big dick for every one of your holes."

He pulls his finger out and smacks my ass. I shudder, curling my arms around my waist. Soaking wet, he steps out of the shower, splashing water everywhere.

"Get dressed and go to bed," he orders. "If I catch you whoring it out again, I'll be forced to remind you who you belong to."

As soon as he's gone, I slide to the shower floor, giving in to full-bodied sobs. I hug myself, crying, until the water goes cold and my teeth chatter. By the time I turn the shower off and towel off, he's gone. I pull on my warmest pajamas, find my phone on the floor, and then crawl into bed. Once under the covers, I check to see if I've missed any texts.

Nothing.

I send Winston a text.

Me: I can't do this anymore. I'm sorry.

He responds immediately.

Winston: You don't have a choice. See you at eight AM sharp.

Me: I can't, Win. I have to quit.

Winston: The Morellis are evil as fuck, Ash. I'm sorry if I was being an asshole tonight,

but I'm pissed and have to figure out a way to get them off my back. Don't quit, please.

Me: It's not that.

Winston: Then why?

Me: I have to.

Several minutes go by with no response. I yawn and am nearly asleep when he texts back.

Winston: The car will be by to pick you up in the morning. You're to get in with no complaint. We'll talk about what's bothering you. In person. You're not quitting over text.

I still have to get my bird.

Me: Okay.

Winston: Good girl.

His text has me bursting into tears once more.

I walk into Winston's living room, exhausted and overwhelmed. My emotions are all over the place. Disgust makes me sick to my stomach. I had to sit through

breakfast with Sparrow and Manda like Scout didn't just violate me the night before. As soon as I saw the black Mercedes pull up to pick me up, I flew out of the house, not bothering to say goodbye.

I'm wearing clothes too warm for the day, but I couldn't bear the idea to show more skin than necessary this morning. The jeans I have on are my comfiest pair, and the hoodie is oversized. Tennis shoes and a ponytail complete the look. My eyes are still puffy from last night, but I couldn't be bothered to put on makeup to cover them up.

"Good morning," Winston rumbles, appearing from the hallway, dressed in his usual suit. "The personal shopper will be here by nine to take your measurements—"

He stops mid-sentence as his eyes sweep over me, taking in my outfit. I hug my middle, unable to meet his stare. Shrimp chirps from someplace high, but other than that, it's quiet. Winston approaches, his shoes stopping when they're inches from mine.

"Look at me."

I blink back tears, shaking my head.

His grip is gentle on my jaw as he tilts my head up. "Are you upset with me?"

"No," I choke out, my lip wobbling.

"Why are you upset then?"

A tear escapes, racing down my cheek as I shrug.

"Not an answer, darling. Who upset you?" His eyes darken. "Did the Morellis come to your house?"

"No," I assure him. "I had a fight with my stepbrother."

"About?"

"You."

His eyes narrow. "Elaborate."

"I'm not allowed to see you."

"I see," he rumbles, his jaw clenching. "What does Dr. Mannford have to say?"

"She thinks it's a wonderful opportunity for me to work for you." I sniffle and bark out a laugh. "She thinks I can nab me a Constantine."

"We're not that easy to pin down." He smirks at me. "So, who gives a fuck about what your stepbrother says?"

I cringe as I remember last night. Winston clutches my shoulder in a comforting move, but I cry out the second

his fingers press into the bruise Scout gave to me with his teeth.

"Take off your hoodie," Winston growls.

"That'll cost you." Tears skate down my cheeks.

"I'll fucking pay it. Take it off."

I nod and pull it off my body. He takes it from me, tossing it to the floor. Sweeping my hair to the side, he pulls on my tank top strap so he can see.

"These are teeth marks, Ash," Winston utters, his voice low and furious. "Your stepbrother do this to you?"

"He's a mean bastard."

"You're not quitting."

I chew on my lip. "I have to."

"Or he'll bite you again?" Winston roars. "Fuck that guy. I'll take care of this shit."

Grabbing his tie, I pull him closer. "Please don't. It'll make it worse."

He wraps his hand around my ponytail and presses his lips to mine, kissing me like he owns me. All the bad stuff melts away as his tongue lashes against mine,

dominating me and making unspoken promises. I groan when he palms my ass and squeezes.

"I won't make it worse," he vows. "I'm going to deal with it in a way that keeps you where I want you. Here. With me. Do you trust me?"

No.

Not at all.

It's asking one monster to fight another one.

"You will," he says when I don't answer. "In time, you will."

I honestly hope I can.

13

WINSTON

Tuesday goes smoother than Monday, but that's because I put off some serious 'don't fuck with me' vibes. Nate's been out all day at a meeting, and Perry has taken to following around one of our other associates, Max.

My mind is not anywhere close to my current projects.

It's on her.

That motherfucker bit Ash. I suspect he did more, and she's divulged that he's threatened her. I'm going to kick his scrawny teenage ass.

Or better yet . . .

I'll tell his mommy.

Ash said Dr. Mannford was approving of her association with me. Of course she would be. The Constantines own this city, even if her piss-ant son doesn't realize that.

He will soon.

I shoot an email to Deborah, who's been walking on eggshells today, and immediately receive my answer. Dr. Mannford's phone number. I dial the number of her office and wait for someone to pick up.

"Dr. Mannford's," a voice greets. "How can I help you?"

"I need to speak with Dr. Mannford, please."

"Sorry, sir, but she's in surgeries all day. Can I take a number and have her call you back?"

"No, it's an emergency."

"I apologize, but I can't interrupt her."

"Tell her Winston Constantine is calling, and it's urgent regarding her children."

"Oh . . . okay. Hold please."

I listen to the elevator music for a bit, and then someone answers, breathless.

"Mr. Constantine? Dr. Mannford speaking."

"Ahh, Dr. Mannford," I say, my voice cordial. "Did I interrupt your work?"

"I'm between surgeries," she assures me. "I have time to spare for you. Cindy said there was a matter involving my children? Did . . . Did Ash do something?"

Leaning back in my chair, I swivel around to stare out the window. "No, Dr. Mannford—"

"Please, call me Manda," she interrupts.

I pause, allowing her to feel my irritation at having been interrupted. "This is in regard to your son, Manda."

"Which one?"

"Does it matter?"

"I don't understand . . ."

"But you will." I let out an annoyed sigh. "One of your sons doesn't like that your stepdaughter is working for me. He's let it be known."

She gasps. "Oh, Mr. Constantine, I assure you there's a misunderstand—"

"Winston," I interrupt, giving her a taste of her own medicine. "And I am positive there is no misunderstanding."

"Okay," she says slowly. "I apologize for my son's behavior."

"It can be rectified."

"Then let's do what needs to be done."

"I have a talk with your boy. Make him understand that Ash is a valuable employee to me. I'll require her by my side at many functions. She's to take care of my home during the day in my absence. I may even need her to handle some projects here at the office. I'm paying her well, because she deserves compensation for her efforts." I pause for a long moment. "Let it be clear that I've never employed someone to assist me in various areas of my life. It means Ash is an asset to my company and to me."

"And we're so proud of her," she assures me. "The girl is bright and clever and quite beautiful, wouldn't you agree?"

"Quite."

"Her father is an economic analyst. She always gushes about one day being just like him. You snagged a good

one," she rushes out. "I know she won't let you down." She chuckles. "But I must warn you, Winston, she's quite a charmer. You might fall in love with a sweetheart like her."

I roll my eyes at this woman trying to sell off her stepdaughter like a head of cattle. "Thanks for the warning."

"I'll have a talk with all three of my sons," she assures me. "They're very protective over our girl. Ash is the daughter I never knew I wanted."

"I can see why. And I hope you can see how embarrassing it would be for me to show up at a function with the beautiful girl at my side only to have her marred by bruises," I growl, letting her feel the sting of my words. "Bruises given by teeth are quite nasty. Imagine how the tabloids would react."

She gasps. "Oh, Winston, I am so sorry."

"Make sure it doesn't happen again," I grind out. "I've destroyed careers, ended dynasties, and drowned companies for far, far less. Ash is an asset, and when my assets are threatened, I eliminate threats."

"Listen," she placates. "They're mischievous boys who are used to playing lacrosse and behaving roughly. None of them are used to having a girl around. I'll

discuss with them how they need to be gentle with her. I can assure you it won't happen again."

"Good, because if it does, I won't react well. It will really, really piss me off, Manda."

"It won't."

"Now that we've gotten business off the table," I say, changing my tone to a more cordial one, "let's get to the pleasurable part of the conversation. It would please me and my mother if you and your family would attend my birthday party in two weeks. Official invitations will come by mail, of course, but I wanted you to save the date."

"Absolutely," she agrees, excitement in her voice. "Is this a black-tie affair?"

"Indeed it is. See to it that your boys behave. It's an event that requires gentlemanly decorum."

"They'll be angels."

Right.

"Excellent," I rumble. "It'll be held at the Constantine Compound. Mother gets work done often, though her surgeon is nearing retirement age. Perhaps you could chat with her about changing doctors."

"It would be my pleasure."

"Thank you, Dr. Mannford."

After we hang up, I smirk, knowing one of the Mannford shitheads is about to get an ass chewing from his mommy. Serves him right. I went easy on him. Next time, I *will* be brutal.

I enter my apartment at lunchtime, deciding to check in on Ash rather than eating out like usual. As soon as I walk through the door, I hear laughing. Hers is musical and goes straight to my dick. The other is . . . masculine.

Her bird chirps from my Stefano Papi custom chandelier piece that set me back fifty-seven grand. I don't even care, because there's a fucking man in my house. Stalking down the hallway, I prowl toward the sound. When I round the corner into one of the guest rooms, I freeze, fury turning all my nerves to ice.

A goddamn man has his face near my girl's ass. She's in nothing but her black bra and panties. I'm going to kill him.

"Oh, hey, Win," Ash greets like she's not fucking naked with some guy.

I storm over to the guy and yank him away from her. She screams as I shove the guy against the wall. My fist curls around his throat, squeezing hard.

"Winston! Let Carly go!" she screeches, tugging at my suit jacket.

"What part of no fucking people in my apartment did you not understand?" I seethe, reveling in the way the guy's eyes bulge.

"You sent him here, freak!"

I scowl, snapping my head to the side. "I most certainly did not."

"You're fucking crazy, asshole. He's taking my measurements."

He. He. He.

A fucking him.

I told Deborah to hire a *her*.

"Win," Ash says, bringing her face close to mine. "Calm down. Let him go. You're hurting him." She grips my arm and tugs me away. "There. Thank you."

I glower at Carly as he rubs at his throat. He's small. Prissy. Crying. No threat. Fuck.

"Can you give us a minute, Carly?" Ash asks. "Maybe grab some water?"

"Yes," he croaks out. "I'll be in the kitchen if you need me."

He scampers out of the room like his ass is on fire. Ash approaches me like I'm an injured animal who might bite her. Gently, she runs her palms up the lapels of my suit and threads her fingers behind my neck.

"Are you done being a caveman?" she asks, her head cocking to the side.

I grip her ass, lifting her up. Her legs wrap around me like the good girl she is. "I think I hurt him."

"He'll be okay," she assures me. "Will you?"

I walk over to the window in her room and sit down in the armchair. With her in my lap with nothing but her bra and panties on, I'm no longer a bomb ready to explode. "I'm good now."

"Want to talk about it?"

I grab hold of her messy hair, twisting my fist so I can control her head movement. She gasps when I pull her

to my mouth. Her lips part and I dominate her mouth with my own. Our tongues lash together for a fiery kiss.

"Win," she breathes against my lips, pulling away. "We need to talk about what just happened."

Ignoring her, I trail kisses along her cheek to her jaw and to her neck. She gasps when I suckle on her flesh near her ear. "I expected a woman to measure you. That's what I requested. Seeing a guy touching you made me lose my mind."

She groans when I pull down one cup of her bra, exposing her tit. I pinch the peaked nipple, twisting it hard enough to make her whimper.

"I want to fuck you," I growl as I unhook her bra and yank it away. "Right now. A freebie."

"No," she murmurs.

"Fine, I'll pay you. Name your price." I grip her hips and drag her over my hard dick. "Feel what you do to me?"

"We're not fucking for money." She whimpers when I knead her ass, spreading her ass cheeks. "Winston. I'm serious."

Fuck, she's hot.

Her tits can't be more than a full B cup or a small C, but they make me fucking crazy with need. She's got a perfect body that I'm ravenous for. I want her to ride my dick while I suck on her pretty titties.

"Winston." Her voice is more forceful this time. "Not now. Not when you're like this."

Like what? I arch a brow at her, silently asking that question.

"I don't want our first time to be when you're angry and I'm upset." She frowns, her fingers running along my scruffy cheeks.

"You're upset?"

"Last night was hard on me," she admits, her features falling. "I can't do this today."

"Fuck," I grumble. "I want you so fucking badly."

She gives me a soft smile. "Your freebie will happen. Soon. Just not today." Her brow hikes up in a playful way. "I'm willing to negotiate add-ons though."

"Oh yeah? What kind of add-ons? Ones I'll like?"

"Sure," she sasses. "Location. Position. Duration."

"I want it rough," I murmur, squeezing her ass hard. "I want you to cry and beg."

"Name your price."

"I'm not done." I smirk at her. "I want you somewhere close to people. So they hear who you belong to. Those screams better be all for me but loud enough for them to hear."

She chews on her bottom lip. "A tall order. Probably going to be super expensive."

"Good thing I'm rich," I say with a wolfish grin. "And I want you bare so my come runs down your thighs and makes a big fucking mess."

"How do I know you're clean?" she demands, frowning.

"I am, but I'll provide proof since you don't trust me."

"I trust you." Vulnerability shines in her hazel eyes.

"Good girl," I croon, running my palms up her naked back. "You'll see trusting me comes with great rewards." I kiss her neck. "Am I going to knock you up if I come inside you?"

"Yes."

My dick twitches. "Oh yeah?"

"I need to get on the pill again. I stopped taking it after I broke it off with Tate."

"So if I pinned you down on the bed, ripped your wet panties off, and shoved my dick inside you, I might fuck a baby into you?"

"Exactly that," she grumbles. "Which is why I need to get to the doctor first. Don't be reckless. It's not you."

My palms roam to her front, cupping both breasts before sliding down her flat stomach. I rub my finger across her clit over her silky panties. She whimpers and grips my wrist.

"Maybe I want to be reckless with you," I rumble, rubbing softly.

"You're crazy," she breathes. "You barely know me."

"I know enough."

My phone buzzes from my shirt pocket. I ignore it, but Ash pulls it out, holding it in front of me. Deborah. She only calls when it's important. With an aggravated sigh, I take it from her and answer.

"What?" I bark out.

Ash scowls at me in disproval.

"Leo Morelli will be here in an hour for your meeting, but I don't have one on the books for you."

"I'll see him," I grit out. "Deborah?"

"Yes, sir?"

"You sent a fucking man to take her measurements."

Silence and then a sharp breath as her nails clack on the keyboard.

"No, I sent a Carly, not a man," she whines. "There must have been a mistake."

"Carly *is* a man."

"Oh . . . oh no. I'm so sorry."

I want to rip her a new asshole for this mistake, but Ash has crossed her arms over her chest, glaring at me. Something tells me she'll get pissy if I go off on Deborah about this.

"It's fine. From here on out, ask their sex. He can shop for her, but I want the garments and items sent up via my doorman. Don't send another man into my home again with my girl."

Ash scoffs and mouths, "Not your girl."

I tease her clit, reminding her she so fucking is.

"Your girl?" Deborah asks. "I'm confused. Pardon me, sir, but you've been vague lately and agitated. If I'm to help you, you'll need to open up the lines of communi

cation. Please. I can't serve you properly unless you give me all the information."

She's not wrong.

"Of course," I agree. "We'll discuss it later. Send everyone home now, please. I don't want anyone on the floor when Leo Morelli arrives."

"I'm on it."

As soon as I hang up, I pull Ash to me for another hot kiss. I have to end it even though I don't want to.

"I have to leave. I have a meeting with Morelli in less than an hour." I sigh, frustrated that I can't continue playing with Ash.

She frowns at me. "Be careful."

Two words I've never heard uttered to me. Ever. I'm used to handling my own. I'm perfectly capable. But something about her concern makes my chest tighten.

"It's Morelli who needs to be careful."

14

ASH

Winston Constantine is a strange man. He wears indifference like one of his expensive suits. It's a part of who he is. Yet, when it comes to me, the mask comes flying off. Beneath the bored, smug, confident man is a beast.

Starving.

Angry.

Possessive.

For some reason, he's got it into his intelligent mind that he wants me. I'm not sure for how long. All I know is he will pay dearly to have me.

But it's more than that.

It's like he thinks he owns me and not in a "I paid for her" kind of way. More like in a primal, feral caveman way. It makes me wonder how screwed up I am, because I like feeling that sense of ownership over me. In a way, it makes me feel safe and protected.

"I'll be sure to send up some lovely options for you to wear," Carly says to me with a soft smile and then glances at Winston. "Goodbye, Mr. Constantine. Thank you again."

Carly leaves, and I arch a brow at Winston. "You choke him out and he thanks you?"

"I just tipped him ten grand." He smirks. "Who needs to apologize when money speaks for you?"

I make a pretend gagging motion that has him pouncing on me again. This time, though, I'm dressed so I don't feel as vulnerable. He grips my jaw, angling my head up and kisses me like he's shackling me to him. The kiss is too urgent—too violent—to do anything except accept his terms.

I belong to him.

It's unspoken, but the agreement shivers its way down my spine.

"I have to leave," he grumbles. "They'll be there soon."

Another bout of nerves consumes me. I hadn't been joking when I told him I wanted him to be careful. There was something in the air last night between Morelli and Winston that made me sick to my stomach. It's more than bad blood. Something far more sinister. And somehow, I got caught right up in the middle of it.

"I'll be right here," I say, pulling away from his grip. "Cleaning this already immaculate condo."

He smirks. "Be ready. I might request something naughty later. Something humiliating."

If anyone else told me they allowed a man to do this to them and accepted money for it, I'd tell them they needed to seek therapy. He's a villain who looks the part of a golden prince. It's an addictive combination that has me all sorts of confused.

"If the price is right," I sass back, my cheeks flashing hot.

I peruse his fitted charcoal-gray suit all the way to the bulge in his slacks. His cock is hard and strains against the fabric. My own panties dampen at the sight, and my clit pulses as I remember his touch from earlier.

"Keep looking at my dick like you want to know it on a first-name basis, Cinderelliott, and I'm going to make

you give it a proper greeting. One where you bow on your knees and kiss the crown."

My eyes dart back to his. Depravity shines in his dark blue eyes. I should run far, far away from this man, because his depths promise a path I won't come back from. His proclivities are unique but twisted. Ones I will become irrevocably changed by.

Do I want to change?

When I'm thinking clearly, no. However, when he eats me alive with a simple stare, I want to strip for him and worship him from my knees.

Winston Constantine makes me weak.

"Enjoy your day," I croak out. "If you'll excuse me, I have work to do."

His lips kick up on one side in a half-grin. "See you soon. Be prepared to finish this conversation later."

He storms off, vacating the condo without another word. I suck in a lungful of air that still smells like him. Spicy. Expensive. Clean. Masculine.

"I'm in trouble, Shrimp," I call out to my parakeet that's fluttering his wings from the chandelier. "He's going to wreck me."

Shrimp sings like he agrees, but he doesn't sound entirely mad about it. In fact, Shrimp appears to love his new digs. I guess if I were a bird and suddenly had more space to fly, I'd be chipper too.

I spend the next hour dusting. The dust doesn't exist, but I need to keep my mind busy. Otherwise, I'll worry about Winston's meeting with the Morelli man and just how much money my safety is worth. Shrimp, my nosy bird, follows me around, chirping loudly from my shoulder as I explore rooms I've never seen in Winston's condo.

Buzz.

I toss the duster down and quickly read my text, hoping for news from Winston. When I realize it's from one of the Terror Triplets, I freeze.

Scout: I'm sorry for mishandling you, dear sis. Please accept my apologies. I'm just a boy who doesn't know his own strength. Forgive me.

I cringe at his ridiculous apology.

Me: Lose my number.

Scout: We're family. Don't be like that.

Family doesn't hurt one another the way he hurt me last night.

Me: You're nothing to me, Scout. Nothing.

Scout: I'll persuade you. You'll see.

His ideas of persuasion make me shudder. No thank you. I'm about to respond when someone raps on the door. For a split second, I worry Scout has found me. I urge Shrimp to fly to his chandelier and then make my way to the front door. I peek through the hole and am relieved to see Nate rather than Scout. I'm about to open the door when I think better of it.

"Can I help you?" I ask through the door, slowly turning the lock to engage.

Nate chuckles. "You could let me in."

"Winston doesn't want visitors," I say in a tight voice. "Sorry."

"Then why would he give me a key?" He holds up his keys, jangling them in front of the peep hole. "I could let myself in. I'm being polite."

"It's just that Winston just told me—"

"I understand. The Morellis are all over his ass right now. You have every right to be afraid, honey. But I just

left the office where Winston told me to come here and wait for him. Trust me, Winston is going to be in a shit mood when he gets back. Don't give him one more thing to chew our asses out about."

He does have a key . . .

"Fine, but I'm going to text him to be sure."

"Whatever makes you happy," Nate says as I disengage the lock and open the door.

His gaze sweeps over me, and he beams. Still the same friendly guy as last night. And Winston's friend. I'm being paranoid, thanks to Scout and the Morellis.

"Come on in," I grumble. "Do you want something to drink?"

A laugh barks out of him as he enters. "No, honey. And don't let Winston catch you playing hostess. I don't think that's what he's hired you to do. I know where he keeps his liquor. I can serve myself."

I shut the door and follow after him. He strolls into the space like he's been here a hundred times before, making a beeline for Winston's bar area across the living room. I relax a little knowing he's used to hanging out here. Pulling out my phone, I start to text Winston but then worry I might distract him from his

meeting. I'll see how this goes with Nate and then decide if I need to text him. Surely, I can handle his friend all by myself.

Nate pours himself a tumbler of amber liquid and then holds his glass up. "Can I offer you one?"

"No thanks. I'm supposed to be working." I give him a curt smile.

"Take a break and indulge me in small talk." He walks over to the sofa and sits down. "Do you live here now?"

I scoff at his words. "No. I'm his maid, not his girlfriend."

"Hmm," is all he says, winking at me over the top of his glass as he sips it. "You'll have to pardon me. Winston is a mysterious man. We've been friends for years, and I've never seen him so . . . smitten."

Smitten seems like such a trivial word for Winston.

Obsessed. Consumed. Paralyzed by the need to throw money at me. That's more the Winston I know.

"He's a complicated man," I agree as I pick up my duster. "Now, if you'll excuse me."

I stick to dusting in the same room as him so I can keep an eye on him. He messes with his phone as he drinks,

clearly already bored at having to wait for his friend. Good. Maybe he'll leave soon.

The doorbell rings, and I jump. Why are all these people showing up? Nate stands, a frown of concern painted on his face.

"Are you expecting someone?" he asks.

"I wasn't expecting anyone, but you people keep showing up," I grumble.

He prowls after me like he thinks he needs to protect me. I do relax a bit knowing he's here. If it's Scout, I don't think Nate would allow him to hurt me. I peek through the hole and let out a relieved sigh.

"It's just the doorman," I murmur.

"Good. I'll enjoy my drink then."

Nate walks off, and I answer the door. The doorman smiles at me. He has a cart loaded down with boxes and garment bags.

"These are from Mr. Carly. He said it's all he could do in a pinch, but he's working on a more extensive wardrobe. May I come in and unload your things, Miss Elliott?"

I nod, shocked that not only does he know my name, but that Carly managed to get me clothes already. The doorman drags the cart inside, and I usher him down the hall to the guest room I've come to think of as mine. He puts away each item in the closet and the dresser drawers. As he turns to leave, I stop him.

"Wait, I uh, let me get some cash for a tip," I blurt out.

He chuckles. "Don't insult Mr. Constantine, Miss Elliott. He pays me well enough that I never need accept any tips from this condo. Have a great day."

As soon as he leaves, I make my way back into the living room, but Nate isn't there. Nerves shoot through me, making me tremble. I hurry down the hall, peeking in each room, looking to see where he went. When I come up empty, I start for the stairs. He appears at the top, a mischievous grin on his face.

"You shouldn't be up there," I gripe. "There's no reason to go upstairs."

"Ahh, but that's where you're wrong," Nate says with a maddening smirk. "Your fancy boss man has heated towels in his bathroom. The guest bathroom down stairs doesn't offer such amenities. He's spoiled me to those damn warm towels."

Rich boys and their prissy needs.

Gross.

He makes his way down the stairs. I've almost started back on my task of pretend dusting when my phone rings in my pocket. I yank it out and answer, expecting Winston. Instead, Manda's voice purrs down the line.

"Hello, darling," she croons. "How is your work for Mr. Constantine coming along?"

"Just dandy."

Nate eyes me with curiosity as he helps himself to another drink. I don't want to leave him alone again for privacy, but I also don't want to have a conversation with my stepmother in front of him. In the end, I opt for hiding in the kitchen out of earshot, but where I can still keep an eye on him. Manda rambles, and it isn't until she mentions Scout that I realize I've missed nearly all of what she's said.

"What?" I croak out.

"I said I apologize for my son's behavior. I can assure you it won't happen again."

She knows? How?

"What did he say happened?"

She sighs. "That he got rough with you. Hurt you. Like Mr. Constantine said, he indeed bit you—"

"Wait. You spoke to Winston?"

"I did," she says, her smile wide in her voice. "He explained how important you are to him. Mentioned that Scout had hurt you. Sweetie, next time just come to me. We can handle our family matters without assistance from Mr. Constantine. It was rather embarrassing to be called at work this morning regarding what happened. You know how Scout can be. He's broody like his father."

"Did you tell Dad?"

"Heavens no," she breathes. "Your father is a busy man. I can handle my children."

Silence fills the air as I wait for her to continue. After a beat, she continues cheerfully as though we didn't just gloss over the fact her son sexually assaulted me, bit me, and threatened me.

"After your shift with Mr. Constantine, I'll pick you up for a much-needed girls' night," Manda says. "Just the two of us. We'll go to our favorite restaurant."

I really don't want to hang out with my stepmother, but I can't hide out at Winston's forever.

"Sure," I mumble. "Is that it?"

"Dress nicely, sweetie. You're making a name for yourself in the elite society being Mr. Constantine's new plaything. If you're seen in public, you need to be absolutely flawless." She chuckles. "No more sloppiness."

"Winston had some clothes delivered. I'll be dressed just fine."

"Did he now?" She can barely contain her excitement. "I knew he was taken with you. If he's buying you clothes, sweetie, it won't be long before he's buying you a ring too. The Constantine name will certainly suit you."

It's annoying that I'm suddenly deemed important now that Winston is in my life. Whatever. I'll take it if it keeps her bastard sons off my back.

"Don't get ahead of yourself, Manda. He bought me clothes. It's not a marriage proposal."

"Not yet," she says. "Text me the location and when your shift ends. I'll be by to pick you up. Goodbye, darling."

I hang up the phone, huffing in annoyance. When I glance up, Nate is leaned against the counter in the

kitchen, his playfulness gone. His eyes are narrowed, and his arms are crossed over his chest.

"Trying to get the great Winston Constantine to marry you? That's what this is all about?" he asks, his brows furling. "A gold digger through and through?"

"What? No. It's just my stepmother," I groan. "Forget you overheard any of that conversation."

"I should get going now." He gives me a polite smile. "And, honey, I never forget a thing."

15

WINSTON

The hours just tick by, pissing me more and more off. It's a game. I know how the Morellis work. They like to keep you on your toes and throw curveballs to trip you up. Unfortunately for them, I anticipated this move. Doesn't mean it doesn't annoy the fuck out of me, though.

"You think they'll come?" Perry asks from the seat beside me, looking up from his phone.

"They'll come."

He goes back to scrolling through his phone. I take the moment to study my brother. Today, he dressed the part in a Brioni two-piece navy pinstripe suit that I know set him back seven grand. His normally messy dark blond hair has been recently cut and styled in a way that makes him seem older than his twenty years. I

have to give the guy credit. He does appear to be trying. And his insistence upon staying with me when everyone else was sent home spoke volumes regarding his loyalty to our family name.

Ding.

The chime of the elevator can be heard all the way into the conference room. Seconds later, the doors open and male voices echo loudly. Perry tenses but otherwise seems to force his body to remain unaffected by the arrival of our most hated foes.

"Good afternoon, boys," Leo Morelli greets from the doorway of the conference room. "Sorry to keep you waiting. We had other business to attend."

I turn my head to pass a glance over our guests. Leo and the Morellis's most-trusted henchman, Trenton Alto. Trenton remains poised, ready for a fight, the muscle in his neck jumping in time with his pulse. Leo, the fucking bastard, grins.

"Does Lucian know you're fraternizing with the enemy?" I ask in greeting.

Leo, unbothered, saunters over to the chair beside Perry and sits. "Lucian has other issues to deal with. Until this one becomes one, I don't see the point in involving my brother."

"A man of his word," I rumble. "I can respect that."

Trenton remains near the door, his watchful eye never leaving me. Unlike these barbarians, I don't pack heat. All the heat I need is in my big fucking wallet.

"Let's get to this," I say, flipping open my laptop. "I had my attorney draw up a generic agreement. As soon as we finalize the details, I'll fill it in, and we can be on our way."

Leo barks out a laugh, elbowing Perry. "Is he always this much of a dick?"

"Where we come from, we call it power," Perry bites back, giving off impressive 'don't fuck with me' vibes.

"Power." Leo shakes his head, his lips twisting into a sneer. "Just because you can't see or understand ours, doesn't mean it's not there."

Interesting.

In his desire to throw his dick around, he's fed me a kernel of information. I knew they were heavily doused in illegal underground operations, but I didn't realize how much so until this moment. It's a thinly veiled threat stating they have one hell of a punch they're packing, even if I can't see it.

Where they have fists, I have financial lordship. They might have legit corporations bringing in money while they do dirt on the side, but I own the buildings, businesses, and people whose pockets they're sticking their hands into.

"I'm not here to talk about your nefarious business dealings, Morelli. I'm here to strike a deal." I pin Leo with a hard glare. "State your terms."

Leo sits up, resting his forearms on the table and steepling his fingers. With his dark hair and wicked stare, it's as though I've welcomed the devil himself into my conference room. Little Leo is nothing compared to his brother Lucian, though. Just a small boy trapped inside a man's body hoping for scraps his brother will throw his way. I eat people like Leo Morelli for lunch. But, because he's homed in on Ash, I'm playing things differently than I normally would.

"I want you to sell me the Baldridge Plaza building." His brow arches as he smirks. "That's it."

That's it?

The building alone is worth millions.

"Go big or go home," I say, leaning back in my seat. "I admire those Morelli balls, but that building is non-

negotiable. Surely we can just settle on a dollar amount that will satisfy you."

"I don't want your money!" Anger flashes in his eyes. "It's a stupid building. Why do you care about it? I said sell it to me, Constantine, not give it to me."

If only Lucian knew his brother was showing his hand so willingly to the enemy. It makes me want to dial up the eldest Morelli brother to tattle on this little prick. Almost. If I involve Lucian, he sure as fuck won't want a dumbass building.

"Why the Baldridge Plaza building? It's a medical building. Certainly a little more legitimate than what you're used to dealing with." I flash him my signature asshole grin, elated when the vein on his neck pops out with fury. "Choose something else."

"No," he snaps, slamming his fist down on the conference room table. "I want that building."

Perry taps away on his computer and then turns the screen toward me. It's the land records of the buildings that surround the thirty-six-thousand-square-foot Baldridge Plaza building. They all have the Morelli name on them.

"I see," I say to Perry. "Someone's been playing too much Monopoly."

"It's one building, and it's not even that big," Leo snaps. "You're surrounded by us. You can't tell me whatever revenue you make from the tenants there will outweigh the sale of it."

Selling the Baldridge Plaza building means giving up an entire block in this city.

It also keeps the Morellis away from Ash.

"It's a choice location, so I'll accept thirty-eight point five mil. Not a penny less." I start typing on the contract. "This agreement states that all Morellis are to keep Miss Elliott's name out of their mouths. It extends beyond her employment with Halcyon. If she should cease her employment here, the contract states it's forbidden for her to take positions that directly lead back to any of your businesses, both legitimate and non-legitimate."

Leo laughs. "I don't want her to work for me."

"Miss Elliott is not to be followed, harassed, questioned, or spoken to," I continue, ignoring him, "or the contract is considered in breach."

Leo leans back in his seat, a smug, satisfied grin on his face. He thinks I handed over a valuable piece of real estate to him without much argument. Truth is, I know

I'll get this property back eventually, along with the entire goddamn block.

"When Lucian finds out about this—"

Leo cuts me off with a wave of his hand, his nostrils flaring slightly. "This is my business, not his."

"Don't be coy, Morelli. We both know you're going to have to ask your big brother for the money."

Perry's lips twitch like he might smile. The kid knows a thing or two about having to rely on his big brother to access his funds. While Leo made us wait, I brushed up on my research of him. Everything from the car he drives to the restaurants he frequents. He's not playing in the same ballgame as we are.

"Money isn't an issue," Leo says, his tone icy cold.

I study him for a long moment, making him squirm as I assess the validity of that statement. "You know, I admit, I thought you'd ask for a lot more."

Again, his eyes flash with unspoken intent. "I'm feeling generous."

"Lucian isn't going to approve," I tell him, giving him a triumphant grin. "His little brother is out striking deals with a Constantine. Are you sure you don't want to wait for him to sign off?"

"Don't insult me, Winston," Leo growls. "You're fucking pushing, and when I'm pushed into a corner, I come out swinging."

"The Morelli anger has always been your family's Achilles' heel," I state, shaking my head in disproval. "It clouds your judgment and makes you retaliate without considering future moves." I finish typing on the document and hit send to the printer. Perry nods at me and strides out of the conference room to grab it. "Remember this conversation later."

"Fuck you, Constantine. You think you're God in this tower overlooking the city below. Talk about clouds . . ." He snorts in disgust. "Your head is so high in them, you can't see the devils doing all the dirty work, stealing all the bricks from your foundation. I look forward to the day you fall."

I glance at my watch just to make this fucker think I have more important shit to do before I finally meet his infuriated glare. "Here's the thing, little Leo." I give him my best boardroom smile—the same one I reserve for the men I shred with one signature on a dotted line. "When you're God, you see . . . *everything*."

"Watch your back," he growls.

A tremor of glee ripples through me that he didn't throw out Ash's name as a threat. The agreement has already successfully taped his mouth shut. He really does want that building. Too bad for him he won't have it long.

"I always do," I say with ease.

The Morellis are cockroaches in my city. They may be plentiful, but they all squash the same beneath my Italian leather dress shoe.

"Here you go," Perry says, handing me the agreement when he reenters the conference room.

I quickly peruse it before sliding it across the table to Leo. "This is an agreement between us, but the actual sale of the building will be handled through my attorney in the morning."

Leo takes his time reading through every word as though that will piss me off. I'm not some idiot who'd try and sneak in hidden verbiage to pull one over on my opponent. No, I'd rather do it the good old-fashioned way, through hard work and perseverance. I'll get my building back plus interest. And when I buy up that entire goddamn city block, Lucian will extract that payment out of Leo's ass, as he should, though they'll

be poorer thanks to Leo. I would die before I let Perry or Keaton go up against Lucian Morelli alone.

"Pen," Leo grunts to Trenton.

Trenton pulls one from his breast pocket and hands it over. Leo scribbles his name across the back page before sending it my way. Using my own pen that probably costs more than his entire outfit, I sign with my usual distinguished Constantine flourishes.

"Nice doing business with you. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have more money to make." I tip my head at him. "Tell Lucian I said hello."

Leo grunts in response, storming from the room as though he can't get away from me fast enough. When I hear the ding of the elevator and then their murmured voices disappearing, I let out a harsh breath of relief.

"Sounded too easy," Perry notes, frowning at me. "But he just fucked himself, didn't he?"

"You're learning, kid," I say with a proud grin. "Starting tomorrow, we're going to research every building and tenant surrounding them. We'll topple their empire on that block from the inside out. You'll see."

"I have no doubt," he says with a boyish chuckle.

"Not to mention, he just bought the Baldridge Plaza building. The same building I pried from Duncan Baldridge's steely grip two years ago. Duncan's been waiting for the opportunity to get it back. It's been in his family since 1910. I'm sure it must feel demeaning officing in a building you used to own that's now owned by a Constantine." I pause and smirk at Perry. "Imagine how annoyed he'll be when he discovers a Morelli purchased it."

"I swear, you enjoy fucking with people more than making actual money."

At this, I laugh, a genuine one. "It's definitely a favorite hobby of mine."

"Sadistic fucker," he throws back, shaking his head and fighting a grin.

I'll make a man out of this boy yet.

"I'm going to offer Duncan an opportunity. I'm going to let him buy his building back."

Perry's brows fly high. "This sounds complicated."

"It's rather easy, little brother. I make Duncan do my dirty work, delivering on my promise once he succeeds."

"And then . . ."

"You're learning quickly." My grin is wolfish. "And then I take my fucking building back."

"That's a lot of trouble when you could have said no in the first place."

"It'll keep Leo distracted, Duncan eager and willing to do my bidding, and Aṣh safe."

Perry's brows furrow. "You really like this chick."

I ponder his words for a moment before exhaling heavily. "Which is why I must go to great lengths to protect her." Our eyes meet as I deliver my next words. "I've never liked anyone the way I like her. This is a weakness they see and will try to exploit at every turn."

"I've got your back, man."

"Of course you do. You're a Constantine." I pin him with a hard stare. "None of this leaves this room. The only trust a Constantine has is with someone who shares the same blood. Don't ever forget it."

"Never, Winny."

It pleases me my brother is already learning the Constantine way--my way. He'll make our family proud, especially me. I never saw myself bringing a child into this world, so it gives me relief knowing

Perry might be moldable to one day take my place as a son would. Dad would want it this way.

"You did well today, Perry."

His blue eyes flash with surprise. "I did?"

"Keep it up, and you'll take Nate's office."

Determination that reminds me of our father morphs his young features into a fierce expression. "I won't let you down. I can do this."

"I know. Constantines aren't weak. We're the blood that runs through the veins of this city. You may be young, but you're still one of us."

16

ASH

Manda will be here soon, and I've yet to make contact with Winston, which leaves me worried. I shouldn't be. I know he can handle himself, but I can't help it. He's been a tornado in my life, but I can't complain too much. He's given me a means to support myself, a safe haven for my bird, and an escape from my wicked stepbrothers. In some ways, he's my hero. A dark hero with a villainous smile and a black cape, hellbent on destroying everyone beneath his feet. For some insane reason, he's intrigued with me, which goes a long way in Winston Constantine's world.

Rather than dissecting what all this means, I focus on dressing. Manda said dinner was casual, but we both know my version of casual and hers are two totally different things. I select a white Valentino V-print silk

shift dress. The long, billowy sleeves are fun, and the short length is sexy but still screams money, which I know Manda will appreciate. I pair it with white Jimmy Choo leather block-heel sandals that are just high enough to give my calves a shapelier look but not so high I break my neck. I could kiss Carly right now for the reasonable options he selected. If it had been up to Winston, there's no telling what I would be wearing right now.

As if the devil has been summoned, my phone buzzes with a text.

Winston: I'll be home soon.

His words cause a flutter in my stomach.

Me: We may miss each other. I'm to have dinner with my stepmother. She's picking me up soon.

Winston: How much will it cost to get you to stay?

Me: I really should go . . .

Winston: Maybe I should come up with something for you to do while at your dinner.

A tiny thrill shoots through me.

Me: Maybe you should.

Winston: I have an idea. It's going to be embarrassing, and you'll hate every second of it.

Me: Sounds expensive.

Winston: I have expensive tastes.

A laugh tumbles out of me.

Me: Name your stakes, Win, and I'll give you a price.

Winston: So sure you'll do it?

Me: I'm learning I can handle whatever you throw my way.

Winston: Oh, Cinderelliott, your eagerness to challenge me gets my dick really hard.

My skin heats, and I fumble with what I want to reply with. He saves me from having to respond because he launches into what he wants.

Winston: Since you're mine and I pay for you, I want every detail as it happens. What

you're wearing. Where you're going. The name of the driver. The restaurant. What your server looks like. The food you're eating. The wine. I want to approve or disapprove of every aspect of your evening.

Sounds super controlling but hot.

Me: Manda won't like it if I'm on my phone . . .

Winston: Blame me. That I need to know these things. That it's important to me. She'll understand. How much?

Me: Five thousand.

It's a huge amount but I'm learning I underbid myself with this man all the time.

Winston: If you call me during a bathroom break and do as I say, I'll double it.

Holy shit.

Ten grand to have dinner with my stepmother and give Winston every single detail.

Me: Deal.

Winston: Excellent. Now send me a picture of your outfit.

I walk over to the long mirror and playfully poke out my tongue for the picture. I really like this outfit so if he makes me change, I'll be disappointed.

Winston: I like your hair down like that. The dress is a little short. Are you trying to turn on every guy in NYC?

Me: No.

Winston: They'll all be half-hard when they see those golden legs on full display. What color are your panties?

Me: A nude thong.

Winston: I want those gone. Leave them on the guest bed so when I come home, I can wrap them around my dick and jerk off.

Heat floods through me, pooling in my belly.

Me: Okay.

Winston: It makes you wet thinking about my dick. Show me how wet.

Me: I'm not sending you a picture of my pussy!

Winston: Your wet finger will do.

This guy is so filthy. With a groan, I slide my thong off, embarrassed that there's a damp spot of arousal on them. I toss them on the bed and then awkwardly reach beneath my short dress to touch myself. Winston is right. It does turn me on thinking about my panties around his dick. A groan rasps out of me as I slide my finger into my slick warmth. After getting it nice and wet, I pull it out and take a picture for him.

My phone rings immediately.

"Hello?"

"Suck on that juicy finger," Winston commands, his voice a deep growl.

"Won't that be kind of gross?"

"I'm a gross man. Lick it off and be noisy about it."

My cheeks blaze with crimson, but I suck my arousal off my finger, careful to add in sound effects for his benefit.

"For every person you accidentally flash, I want you to text me about it. I'll reward you each time. I hope you're ready to make some serious money."

The thought of accidentally flashing anyone is mortifying, but this game, money or not, intrigues me.

"You bring out the worst in me," I complain, though I do it through a grin.

"I have that effect on people." He chuckles, the warm, dark sound reverberating to my core. "Don't forget to tell me everything. I want all the details. Make the time for me, Ash."

My phone buzzes, and it's Manda stating she's here.

"Crap. She's here. I have to leave." I chew on my lip for a second. "What will you be doing?"

"My hand until you decide to let me fuck your tight, young body."

"You're such a little weirdo," I hiss as I snatch up my purse. "Don't forget to say hello to Shrimp. He likes you."

"I assure you, there is nothing little about me. And I'm not saying hello to a bird."

"Please."

"That'll cost you."

"Name your price, Constantine."

"When you call from the bathroom later, you have to FaceTime me and let me see you."

"Deal."

"Good girl," he croons. "Now get going."

"Yes, sir," I tease before hanging up.

I rush out of the condo and then step onto the elevator. When I reach the bottom, I nearly crash into a guy as I exit. He eye fucks me in a way that makes me shiver.

"I belong to Constantine," I state, unable to help the words that rush out of my mouth.

The guy's eyes widen, and he holds up a hand. "No offense, ma'am. You just look beautiful. No disrespect to you or Mr. Constantine."

I give him a bitchy smile and then stride away from the elevator with my chin lifted. My silky dress sways with each long step I take, riding up my thighs. There's a thrill that trembles through me knowing I'm walking around without panties, and a gust of wind or bending over might just reveal that fact to everyone. When I reach the black limo, I frown in confusion.

The driver steps out upon seeing me and holds the door open for me. I go to sit down inside the limo, but my purse slips from my grip to the pavement. He bends to grab it up. Without second-guessing myself, I part my thighs giving the man an eyeful.

His choked sound and the hasty way he hands me my purse tell me he saw everything. My face burns as he closes the door. Manda gives me a polite smile but is on the phone talking about a nose job. I pull out my phone and text Winston.

Me: The driver saw everything.

My phone pings with a five-hundred-dollar payment.

Me: You're ridiculous.

I send him an eyeroll emoji.

Winston: You're welcome.

"You look happy," Manda says, dragging me from my phone. "Mr. Constantine put that smile on your face?"

"He can be, uh, charming sometimes." Not exactly the word, but it'll do.

"This ensemble is new. It's very stylish, darling. Shows off your pretty legs. You'll have that man falling in love

in no time." Then, to the driver, she says, "We have reservations at Blue Oak."

Me: Blue Oak. Headed there now. Also, Manda thinks my legs will make you fall in love.

"Is that him?" Manda asks, an amused smile on her face.

"He likes it when I check in with him and let him know where I'm going." My neck heats. "To, uh, keep me safe."

"A gentleman." She winks at me.

Winston: Your legs make me feel a lot of things, but love isn't one of them.

Me: Jerk.

Winston: Aww, the little girl wants the evil man to love her.

I shoot him several middle finger emojis.

We arrive at the restaurant, and the driver opens the door for me. He's careful to keep his eyes averted this time. Once out of the limo, Manda and I head inside. The restaurant is one she enjoys coming to. I've been here a couple times with her and Dad.

The hostess takes us over to a table in the corner. While Manda decides on her drink, I text Winston a picture of the menu. It's a mixture of annoying and sexy that he tells me what I'll be drinking. He also chooses my entree as well. Manda is no doubt intrigued but doesn't say anything, instead launching into stories about her work.

When the server comes back to refill my water, I drop my napkin. He squats to pick it up just as I part my thighs. Rather than be embarrassed, the server stares for a long beat, licks his lips, and then gives me a knowing smile as he places the napkin back on my lap covering my bare thighs.

I text Winston immediately, ignoring Manda's confused stare.

Me: The server got an eyeful. He wasn't embarrassed. I think he thinks I like him now.

He doesn't reply but a few minutes later a different server appears, eating hers, replacing the other one.

Me: You tell me to do something and then punish the guy when he looks?

Winston: This is my game. I make the rules.

I ignore him as I turn my attention to Manda when her words make my blood run cold.

"...which is why I also invited them. So we could make peace about what happened."

Realization dawns on me. She invited her terrible sons. I'm frozen in place until I see them enter the restaurant.

Me: How about that phone call now???

Winston doesn't reply. Rather than letting the assholes swarm me, I stand up and excuse myself. I hurry to the restroom, eager to escape those bastards. Once in the safety of the women's restroom, I let out a heavy sigh of relief. I make my way into a stall and sit on the closed toilet lid as I wait for Winston to call me.

By running off, I let them win.

They've succeeded in intimidating me.

My skin crawls as I remember the way Scout brutalized me. His threats. I'm not looking to repeat any of that. Manda is delusional if she thinks they're going to behave.

Me: I'm in the stall waiting. What are we doing? Phone sex? Want to just come get

me? I'll fuck you for real. I don't want to go back home.

No response.

Me: Look . . . a freebie for you.

I spread my thighs and angle the camera between my thighs.

Nothing.

Me: Please come get me, Win.

The desperation in my texts is embarrassing, but I hate the idea of going back out there and having all three of their eyes on me.

I try calling Winston to no avail. Tears threaten as panic consumes me.

Breathe, Ash.

You can do this.

With my phone tight in my grip, I make my way out of the stall. I linger by the sink, working up the nerve to leave this bathroom, tell Manda something came up, and take an Uber anywhere but here.

The door opens and footsteps file in. All the muscles in my body tighten as three vicious man-boys in dress

clothes swarm me. Sparrow and Sully take their place on either side of me and Scout crowds me from behind.

I'm trapped.

"Move," I growl, my voice trembling despite my false bravado.

Scout laughs, cruel and mocking. "No." He cups my ass, giving it a squeeze over my dress. "In fact, I'd quite like to bend you over this sink and make you scream. What do you think, sis? Feel like getting fucked by all three of your brothers in a bathroom like a nasty, paid-for whore? Will it make it better if we buy you jewelry? Is that what Constantine does? Do you get paid to suck his little dick?"

I twist to face him, lifting my chin so I can shoot him with a fiery glare. "Leave me the fuck alone, psycho."

Scout's eyes flash with violence making my heart skip a few beats. Before he can respond, my phone rings in my hand. I answer the FaceTime call and bring it to my face.

"Hello, Mr. Constantine," I greet. "I was expecting your call."

Winston's glare is fierce as he takes in the reflection in the mirror. Three awful boys crowding me. My hand shakes making the camera move.

"Is everything okay? Those children aren't bothering you, are they?" His voice is sharp and cold. "I wouldn't want to have to tattle to their mommy."

Scout's hateful stare cuts through me. "She's our sister. We're just checking up on her. Tell Mr. Constantine you're safe. Come now. Mom is expecting us." He plucks the phone from my grip and hangs up, his dark eyes dragging over my front, lingering at my breasts.

"There you are, dear," a voice booms upon entering the bathroom. "It's time to leave. Something came up. I do hope your family will understand your hasty exit."

My heart tumbles in my chest at seeing Winston freaking Constantine storming to my aid like a fucked-up Prince Charming.

All three boys step back. I snatch my phone from Scout's grip and rush into Winston's arms. He's stiff when I hug him. His large palm rests on my ass over my dress, squeezing my cheek like he owns it. I snuggle closer to him.

"Thank you," I murmur.

"If you'll excuse us, boys, we have grown-up things to do now." Winston gives my ass a playful smack. "Let's get you some coffee. We have a long night of . . . *work* . . . ahead of us."

I know he's saying these things to rile up the triplets and piss them off, but it still sends a thrill down my spine.

"I'm looking forward to it, Mr. Constantine."

17

WINSTON

I'm not a stalker.

I just wanted to see her pretty cheeks turn pink as I texted her filthy shit while she tried to dine with her stepmother. From my perch at the bar in the restaurant, I had a prime view, too. Everything was going well, satisfying even when I managed to get that waiter fired on the spot for not only staring a little too long but by placing the napkin back in her lap. As though that piece of shit even had a chance with someone like Ash. I'd been eager to send her to the bathroom, get her worked up, and then I planned on surprising her.

But things got away from me.

Nate called to warn me about Ash's intentions with me. He thinks she wants to marry a Constantine. That

she'll use me for my money. If he only knew... He comes from a good place, though, worrying over my wellbeing. I do, however, question what prompted his sudden concern. Ash Elliott doesn't have the skill to take advantage of a man like me. And if she's really hoping for a ring, the poor girl is delusional. That ship sailed a long time ago, thanks to a girl who broke my heart when I actually had one. I can play with Ash, but no one—not even a naughty girl so willing to please me—will have the opportunity to know that part of me again. Later, when she and I are alone, I'll make sure she understands it, too.

When I finally got rid of Nate, read her texts, and saw her hot as hell smooth pussy, I was ready to fuck her raw. Then, I noticed those bastards had arrived and were following my girl to the restroom. The triplets who have a death wish.

I wanted to kill them.

Hell, I still do.

I'm not used to feeling so out of control. Ash brings out the worst in me, and I can't help but feel a thrill from it.

The triplets are a problem, though, which is why as soon as I get back to my computer, I'm going to find out where those monsters plan on going to college so I can

fuck with them for terrorizing Ash. I thought tattling to their mommy would be enough, but it's clear they're not going to leave her alone until I send a message they can get through their thick skulls.

"You're too quiet," Ash says from the passenger seat, tugging at the hem of her silky dress.

"I'm thinking."

"Does it hurt?"

I glance over at her, amused at the silly grin on her face. "No, smartass. It doesn't hurt. But since you're feeling playful and we didn't get to finish our game, I think sitting in traffic is a perfect time to play."

"Why do I feel like I'm going to hate this?"

"You won't hate it, dirty girl. You're learning you're just as fucked up as I am."

She sighs in resignation because we both know it's true. This goes beyond the money. Sure, she loves it, because who doesn't love money? But this is more. She's turned on by my creative depravity. I love exposing her to it. Infecting her with my filth.

"Show me what everyone else got to see tonight," I say, my eyes on the taillights in front of me. "You sent me a picture, but I need to see the real thing."

The darkness must give her confidence because she slides the silk up her toned thighs and lifts the material.

"Tuck it into your seatbelt," I rumble, watching her from my peripheral. "You're riding home like that."

It's cute that she keeps her thighs pressed together like I won't see.

"Take your sandal off and give me your foot." I glance over at her, loving the panicked look in her eyes. "Now, Cinderelliott."

She huffs as though she's annoyed, but then she kicks off her shoe. Her movements are jerky and awkward, but she manages to stretch her leg across the console. I caress her soft foot, learning all the curves there.

"Feel how hard our games make me?" I grip her foot and rub it over my cock that's hard and straining against my slacks. "You do this, Ash. You make a billionaire like myself horny for a fucking foot."

She laughs. "You are so strange, Win."

"And you're fucking hot for the strangeness I offer." I skim my fingers up her calf, circling the inside of her knee. "Touch yourself."

"Here?" she squeaks out. "Now?"

"We're in traffic. What else do we have to do but sit and entertain ourselves?"

"Fine."

"Don't act like pleasure is a hardship, brat. You like to feel good as much as the next person. At least I'm paying you for it."

"You always make this stuff ten times more awkward by reminding me of that," she grumbles.

"Stop stalling," I murmur, running my fingers higher up her thigh toward her pussy. "Touch yourself before I do it for you."

She trembles at my words, deliberately stalling. I smack her cunt hard enough to make her cry out. Her leg jerks up, but I pin it back down so her foot stays pressed against my dick.

"You fucker! You can't hit . . . *that*."

"I'm paying for it. It's mine. I can do whatever I want."

"You're insufferable."

"Touch. Your. Cunt."

She scowls at me, hesitating briefly before she slips her fingers to her pussy. It's quiet as she rubs at her clit slowly. I massage her foot, my eyes glued to the way she

touches herself. The scent of her arousal fills my car and makes me salivate for a taste.

"Does it feel good?" I ask as I run my fingers up her thigh again.

"Yes."

"Are you wet?"

"Yes."

"Slide your finger in and let me see."

Her breath hitches as she pushes into herself. She squirms as she fucks her finger and then pulls it out. I grip her wrist, pulling her hand closer. Leaning in, I wrap my lips around her finger, tasting her.

"Mmm," I praise. "Tastes like the filthy, depraved girl I knew you were."

I bite down on her finger, capturing her. Then, I smack her needy pussy again. She cries out when she tries to pull her hand back, but my teeth dig in, not allowing her to go. A whimper escapes her but it's one filled with desire.

I release her finger as traffic starts to move. "That's enough for now. Traffic's moving again."

She pulls her leg back and starts to mess with her dress, but I stop her with a smack to her thigh. "Ow!" she screeches. "You dick."

"Keep your pussy on display," I growl. "But don't touch it. I'll let you touch it later after your bath."

"Are we going to . . ."

"I'm not ready to fuck you yet, Cinderelliott. I want to play with my toy more."

"See, when you say crap like that, I'm suddenly not into it."

I let out a dark chuckle. "No, my sweet, young girl, you're feeling rejected because you assume that my not fucking you means I'm not into you." I brush my fingertips along her naked pussy making her shudder. "I can assure you I'm very, very into you."

She's quiet but doesn't push away my curious finger as I tease her thigh and occasionally dance them along her pussy lips. Her breathing has grown heavier, which means she's hot for my touch. It only makes me want to deny her further.

When we pull up to my building, I reach over and tug her dress free, covering up her pussy. A valet named Chris opens the door for her. She's suddenly modest,

making sure to keep herself covered. I climb out and make my way over to her, offering my elbow. She holds on and surprises me by leaning her head against my shoulder. My chest squeezes in response.

I nod when we're greeted upon arriving inside the building. We make our way into the elevator and within minutes, we're in my sanctuary. Shrimp chirps from his favorite perch.

"Hi, Shrimpy Shrimp," Ash croons, waving at her bird. He flaps his wings and sings back at her.

"Let's go to your room. You need a bath, little girl."

"My room?"

"It's a guest room, and you're my guest. What else should I call it?"

"You're not going to give me a bath, are you? Because that'll cost you extra."

I follow her into her room. "No. You can bathe yourself. I'll be waiting for you when you get out. Don't dress."

She turns in front of the bed and frowns at me. "We're not having sex?"

"Nope."

With an annoyed sigh, she kicks off her sandals, drops her purse on the dresser, and storms into the bathroom. The door slams shut, and then the shower begins to run. I walk over to the closet where I stowed away the presents I got for her today. After setting the box on the bed, I pick up her panties she left earlier and bring them to my nose.

Fuck, her scent turns me on.

I walk over to the chair and drag it closer to the bed. Once I sit, I lean back, sprawled out and waiting. While I wait, I pay her all the money I owe her for the evening. I imagine she's enjoying the way her bank balance grows with each day. I've never taken care of anyone, and it gives me pride knowing this helps her. I suppose I sort of understand the whole daddy kink. But, like the respectable girl Ash is, I make her fucking earn it.

After the longest shower ever, she finally returns in nothing but a towel. Her hair is wet and combed out. Since she washed her makeup off, she seems so young and innocent.

"You don't need that towel," I rumble as I toy with her panties in my hand. "I will though. Leave it on the arm of the chair here."

She narrows her eyes but walks over to me. With a steadying sigh, she plucks the towel from her body and drops it on the arm beside me, revealing all her perfect nakedness.

"Get your phone and set it up over there to record you on the bed," I instruct.

"It'll cost you, Constantine," she sasses as she walks over to the dresser, swaying her curvy ass along the way.

"If you're a good girl and do as I say, I'll make you very rich tonight."

She arches a brow at me. "How rich?"

"What's the first semester of college going to cost you?"

"Win!" she cries out. "I think I have enough now. You don't have to do this."

"How. Much?"

"Almost thirty-eight grand, you freaking psycho."

"Forty. Do exactly as I say, and I will send you forty grand when I tuck you in for bed later."

"Am I going to like it?"

"You're a fucking freak, Ash. Of course you will."

Her cheeks tinge pink. "Fine. You want to waste your money on kinky shit, so be it. What'll it be? Are you going to spank me?"

I chuckle and crook a finger at her, beckoning her closer. "Come unzip me."

"I'm going to blow you?"

"Just close your pouty lips and obey me."

Her eyes roll as she saunters my way, looking good enough to fucking devour whole. She kneels between my legs that are sprawled out. With shaky fingers, she brushes against my erection as she unzips my slacks.

"Take my dick out, Ash."

"Then what?" she asks, her voice breathless.

"Get on the bed."

Her lips pout out even further. The girl craves to lick my dick, so my inclination is to deny her. I smirk as she fumbles to find my dick beneath the material of my boxers. Once she finds the hole, she works her fingers inside, seeking out my hot flesh. A groan escapes me when her fingers curl around it. Soon, she has my throbbing dick pulled out through the zipper of my slacks. It stands proud and eager, the tip glistening with precome.

"On the bed," I murmur.

She stands, frowning at me. I wrap the material of her panties around my cock and stroke it a couple of times.

Ash walks over to the bed and climbs on, sitting on her haunches, facing me. So dutiful and eager.

"Open the box," I instruct. "Tell me what you find."

She purses her lips and lifts the lid. Her hazel eyes widen as she picks up a small, silver butt plug with a bright blue stone on the end that sparkles in the overhead light.

"I can't use this," she breathes.

"You will."

She sets it down on the bed and then pulls out some clamps with tassels. "Are these for my nipples?"

"And your clit."

Her head snaps up, her lips parted in shock. "Ow."

"You have no idea." I smirk. "What else?"

She pulls out another butt plug, this one with a racoon tail. "Oh, fuck no."

"That one right there will pay well, Cinderelliott, especially if you wear it with a dress that barely hides it."

She tosses it back into the box and then pulls out another toy. "What is this?"

"Nipple suction. You put that end over your nipple and pump it."

"You're such a fucking freak," she growls. "I'm not using that."

"No, brat, I'll be using it. For tonight, I want to see you put those clamps on." I flash her a wolfish grin. "All three of them. And then I want you to lube up that butt plug. You're going to put it in and wear it while you sleep."

"Why?" she demands. "That'll hurt."

"It won't hurt. You'll do it because I said so. Because I pay you to be a filthy girl for me."

"And . . ."

She's learning. "And you're going to take pictures of yourself so you can look at them later."

"I'm not looking at them later."

"You will, because I'll pay you every time you look at those pictures and pleasure yourself. Stop acting so scandalized. We both know you're going to do it."

She flips me off. "Whatever."

"Put the clamps on."

"So bossy," she grumbles but picks up one of the clamps. I stroke my dick as she rubs at her nipple to make it harden. Then, she gingerly places the claps around her tender flesh. When it closes around it, she sucks in a sharp breath. "Ow."

"You'll get used to it. Carry on."

She does the same for her other nipple and fuck if she isn't the hottest thing I've ever seen. When she picks up the third one, she seems unsure.

"Come here and let me do it."

Rather than arguing, she crawls off the bed, her tassels swinging with each movement. Like a good girl, she walks right up to me, offering me the clamp.

"Straddle my thighs," I instruct. "Hold your pussy lips apart."

Her breath hitches as she climbs onto my lap. My dick is hard between us, twitching with eagerness to be inside her. One day. Not tonight. She touches her pussy, parting herself for me, leaving her clit exposed and vulnerable. Without being gentle, I pinch it with the clamp, reveling in the way she cries out in pain.

"Leave it," I growl when she reaches for it. "It hurts, but you'll get used to it. Go get the butt plug lubed up and rub it against your hole."

She whimpers as she climbs off me, walking like a cowboy with her legs bowed. I stifle a laugh. Once she's back on the bed, she winces and then dutifully lubes up the metal. With her eyes diverted, she reaches behind her, her brows furrowed in concentration, and teases her asshole.

"It'll take some practice to get it in there. If you need help, just ask, beautiful."

She chews on her bottom lip, flinching at her ministrations. "I can do it myself."

It takes a few minutes but then she gasps. Her wild hazel eyes fly to mine. I lift a brow in amusement.

"Is it in?"

"Y-Yes."

"Turn around, bend over, and show me."

She shakes her head. "You just have to trust me."

"So disappointing," I chide.

My words hit the right nerve, because she recoils. Then, like the brat she is, she makes exaggerated move-

ments and obeys me, revealing the pretty sparkling blue stone nestled between her round cheeks.

"Perfect. Now come closer."

Her movements are sluggish and awkward as she learns to walk with a plug in her ass. She finally comes to stand between my thighs. I reach forward and tug at the tassel hanging from her pussy, loving the cry of pain that erupts from her.

"You do the ones on your tits," I instruct. "Don't stop until I tell you to."

She nods and gently tugs on the tassels, shuddering at the sensation. I tug at my cock in tandem with the way I pull on the tassel on her clit clamp. Despite the pain, within seconds she's crying out as an abrupt orgasm floods through her body. Before she comes down from her high, I pull off the clamp. I'm sure all the blood is rushing to her clit now, and it must be painful based on the way she chokes on her tears.

So. Fucking. Perfect.

"On your knees," I growl. "You like it when I hurt you, don't you, Ash?"

She shakes her head in vehemence.

"You're a fucking liar," I say with a wicked grin. "You love when I humiliate you. You want me to call you terrible names just as long as I remind you who you belong to."

"Fuck you, Win."

"On your knees, asset."

"Asset?"

"The help. Toy. Plaything. Whatever the fuck you want to call yourself. Do it."

She flips me off but falls to her knees as I stand. I paint her pretty lips with my cock that leaks with precome. Her tongue darts out, but I pull away.

"No, little girl. You get what I give you. Right now, I want to see your face dripping with my come. You haven't deserved to get it on your greedy tongue."

Her hazel eyes flare with fury as she glares up at me. It makes me wonder what's going on in that head of hers. Is she angry because this darkens her fantasy of wedding bells and happily ever after like Nate suggested? Perhaps she needs a little reminder that I pay top fucking dollar for her humiliation. She'll have to chase the white picket fence and perfect husband

dream once we're done with our dirty games. Until then, she's mine to do whatever the hell I want with.

"You're a poor little girl whose daddy doesn't love her anymore. She has to find a new daddy. One who'll buy her pretty things and tell her she's beautiful." I let out a dark chuckle. "You just want to be loved." I stroke her wet hair. "Sorry, little one, but you found the wrong daddy. I just want to hurt you and humiliate you and shame you. I'm not built to love so if that's what you're thinking you'll get out of this, you're wrong. I'll play with you like I've done everything in my life, and when I get bored, I'll find something else to entertain me. Maybe next year it'll be a yacht. This year, it's you."

A cruel, yet necessary reminder of exactly what this is between us.

Her eyes flood with tears, and she's never looked so pretty.

"Beg for my dick, you poor girl. Beg for it."

"No," she chokes out.

"I'm paying you to beg. That's all this is. You serving me. It's your job."

"I hate you."

"Your pussy is slick, and your ass is filled," I rumble. "The last thing you're feeling is hate. You wish I'd stuff this cock in your tight, almost virgin cunt."

"Fuck you, Constantine!"

"You want that, baby, because then you can start planning the wedding. Am I right? You think if I fuck you, I'll put a ring on it?"

A tear races down her cheek. "I would never marry someone like you."

"Beg. For. My. Come."

Another tear. "No."

"It's all or nothing, Ash. Don't go weak on me now. You're so close to forty fucking thousand dollars. You're not too proud. Think of your career one day."

She sobs. "Please."

"Good girl," I grunt. "Such a good girl."

My come shoots out hot and violent, hitting her eyebrow and then her cheek. With each spurt, I coat her pretty face in my seed. As soon as I'm drained and my dick just drips, I use my cock to smear the come in, reveling in her shocked gasp. I smack her mouth with my dick before pulling back.

Per our agreement, I take a few pictures from her phone so she won't forget every filthy thing we did. Long after this thing between us is over, she'll have this moment stored in her memories—and the cloud for that matter—to get her through her boring missionary sex with her future Prince Charming. I'll be the villain who haunts her fantasies when she has to touch herself, searching for one ounce of the pleasure I used to freely give.

"Clean your face up, Cinderelliott. Let's hope you clean yourself better than you clean my office. You're a fucking mess."

18

ASH

I run into the bathroom, slamming the door behind me. When I catch a glimpse of my messy face in the mirror, I cry harder.

What am I doing?

I just allowed him to humiliate me for forty thousand dollars.

It was horrible.

Turning on the sink, I quickly splash water on my face to wash off his come and my tears. I continue to cry, horrified at my actions as I scrub my face clean. I'm just turning the sink back off when I sense his presence.

"Go away," I sob, unable to meet his stare in the mirror.

"Look at me."

I shake my head, sending more tears flowing down my cheeks. "No."

He grips my hips and twists me around to face him. His expression is pinched slightly, an unusual one on his normally cool features. With a clean towel, he dabs at my face, drying it. I meet his blue eyes and get lost in them.

I don't understand this man.

I thought I could play in his league, but I am so out of my depth here.

"You're brave," he murmurs as he drops the towel at our feet. "And beautiful." His fingers brush back my messy hair. "And mine."

My bottom lip wobbles. I have nothing to say to him. His words mean nothing to me.

He unclamps each nipple clamp, tossing them to the ground. My nipples throb, but I refuse to wince with him staring holes into me.

"Time for bed, little one."

He takes my hand and guides me out of the bathroom. I hate that my heart flutters a little at his gentleness.

The overhead light has been turned off in the bedroom, the box and toys are gone, and the phone is no longer recording. He's already pulled back the covers, and the soft bedside light is the only light in the room. I fall for his stupid tricks, because my heart skips at the way he's taking care of me. Once I'm in the bed, he pulls the covers over my naked body. The butt plug feels strange, but I'm already getting used to it.

"Goodnight, Ash."

"Can I sleep in your bed?" I blurt out, my eyes burning with tears.

He tenses, his expression turning cruel again. "That'll cost you more than you can afford."

Like a ghost, he vanishes. The door slamming shut signifies his exit, making my entire body shudder. I turn off the light and give in to my sadness. Gut-wrenching sobs leave me as I wonder what the hell I'm supposed to do right now. I feel so . . . used. I feel dirty. I'm so tired. I've only known Winston a few days, and he's drained me of everything while he fills my bank account up. I'm not sure the tradeoff is even worth it.

I'm almost asleep when the door creaks open. Soft footsteps pad into the bedroom. The covers pull back and then his large body sinks into the bed with me.

"Come here," he instructs. "I can't sleep with all that crying."

I hate him right now.

I hate myself even more for rolling toward him and curling my naked body around his almost naked one. His strong arm wraps around me, hugging me to him. As I breathe in his masculine scent, I relax in his hold. He lazily teases at my hair.

"Tomorrow, I need to leave," I whisper. "I can't do this."

"I wanted you because you're tough, Ash. Don't grow soft on me now."

More tears leak out. "I'm not as tough as I look."

"What do you need, love? Kind words? Those won't come for free. It's another piece of this game we can negotiate though."

"I have to pay you to be nice to me?" I scoff. "Asshole."

"There's my fiery girl. Come to work with me tomorrow as my personal assistant. Be prepared to do actual business. Promise me this, and I'll give you what you want."

I hold my breath wondering if I can do this. Finally, I exhale and nod. "Okay."

"Good girl," he croons. "Such a dutiful, sweet girl."

His stupid praise that I basically had to pay for washes over me like a cleansing rain. He rolls me onto my back, and then his urgent lips are on mine. Each kiss is sweet and gentle. I hate how it thaws my heart toward him. It's all a stupid game to him, and yet I need it every bit as much as he needs to humiliate me. We both have our kinks.

"So pretty. So perfect. So mine," he murmurs between kisses. "I want to keep you forever."

We kiss for what feels like hours as he whispers assurances that somehow make me forget every horrible thing he said and did to me. When I'm relaxed and content, he pulls away, kisses my forehead, and then leaves the bed once more.

This time, rather than crying, I fall asleep with his kisses lingering on my mind.

Halcyon is incredible. Seeing it bustling with activity rather than alone at night while having to clean it is

something else. I always resented the people who worked here as I emptied their trash and dusted their offices, but seeing them in action has me gaining respect for each of them.

Especially Winston.

I have mixed feelings about last night. On one hand, I want to leave while I'm ahead. I'm more than capable of paying for my first year of college now. It's a great start, and I can relax. I'll be able to apply for loans for the next year. There'll be no reason to play his crazy-ass games anymore.

But another part of me realizes I was just being emotional last night. Winston is a cold, calculating bastard, but he's not heartless. He's come to my rescue on more than one occasion. Whether he'll admit it or not, he cares. His kink is fucked up and borderline cruel, but he never physically hurt me, and I agreed to it all.

He chose me because I'm strong.

Because I can endure his wicked games.

A worthy opponent.

As I walk from the copy room back toward Winston's office, I feel empowered. Yes, Winston Constantine

wants to play horrible games, but I played a round with him and survived.

I can do this.

Each of the secretaries are friendly, but Deborah is frigid toward me. When she sees me, her lips press together, and she looks away from me.

"Hi, Deborah," I say, forcing a smile.

"Mr. Constantine is in a meeting now." She purses her lips. "You may have a seat and wait until he's done."

"But he asked me to make these copies for his meeting—"

"He's asked to not be interrupted," she snaps. "Take a seat, miss."

Someone whistles, and I lift my gaze to see Perry waving at me from inside an office. I grit my teeth to keep from mouthing off at Deborah. Without letting her know how much she pisses me off, I walk over to Perry's office.

"Shut the door," he murmurs.

I close it behind me and have a seat across from his desk. "Is she always a bitch?"

"Always," he confirms with a grin. "It's just Nate in his office. Deborah is on a power trip. Trust me, Winny will have her ass for that little stunt."

"Really?"

"He's obsessed with you."

"He pays me well."

He smirks as he crosses his arms and leans back in his chair, studying me. "We both know you're more than an employee to him."

I'm reminded of what Nate said to me yesterday. How he thinks I'm trying to get Winston to marry me. It unnerves me.

"Nothing more," I assure him. "Just doing my job until college."

"I see," he says, a frown tugging at his lips. "Well, if you ever need help or someone to back you up when Deborah is being a bitch, come see me."

He's no longer the smitten, flirting guy he was at the club the other night. It relaxes me considerably.

"I'm a newbie around here. You sure you want to trust me?" I lift a brow at him.

"You hooked the impenetrable Winston Constantine. If you got inside him, you're something special to him, which means it's my duty as his brother to look after you. Deborah can fuck off. She just wishes she were you."

Perry picks up his phone and texts someone. Then he starts to whistle. Not a minute later, the door flings open, hitting the wall with a loud bang. Winston prowls in, a furious glare on his handsome face.

"Are we taking a break to chit-chat, Miss Elliott?"

I narrow my eyes at him, ready to bite back, but then I realize his lips are curled in amusement. "Asshole."

Perry snorts out a laugh. "I like her."

"You would. You're both children. Let's go, Miss Elliott."

I rise from my seat and get a tiny thrill when Winston places a possessive hand on my lower back. He guides me out of Perry's office. When we make it to his office, he stops to speak to Deborah.

"In case it was unclear," he hisses in a mean tone, "Miss Elliott is my personal assistant. That means she is to assist me during my meetings. She assists me always. Do not ever shoo her away again."

Deborah's face blanches. "I'm so sorry, sir."

"You've been saying that a lot lately."

He walks me into his office and then shuts the door behind us. After he grabs the papers in my hand, he sets them down on the desk.

"Is your butt plug in?" he asks, throwing me off.

"Yes," I whisper. "I took it out this morning like you told me to before my shower and then put it back in before we left."

"I don't believe you." His dark blue eyes glint with challenge.

"Too damn bad."

He pulls out his wallet, fishing out a wad of bills. "This says you'll prove it to me." With a flick of his wrist, he sends the bills fluttering to my feet. "Bend over my desk, lift your skirt, and spread your legs."

"Win!"

"Oh," he taunts. "I forgot." With sarcasm so thick, I want to slap him, he says, "Please my darling little lovebug."

"You're an epic dick."

"So I've been told."

"Say it and mean it," I challenge.

He steps closer until his front is pressed against mine. Gently, he strokes his fingers through my smooth, flat-ironed hair with one hand and gently cups my jaw with the other. I meet his intense stare.

"You're so hot today it takes incredible control not to fuck you," he growls. "I want to do it with the door open so everyone knows you're my fucking girl."

My stupid heart does a flop. "Keep going."

"Spoiled," he gripes, though his eyes twinkle with amusement. "You make me weak, beautiful. So fucking weak."

His words don't feel fake, which confuses me.

"You, weak?" I bark out a laugh. "Never."

He presses his lips to mine, ravishing me with a devastating kiss. I'm so caught up in his kiss, I forget where we are, clinging to his suit jacket, wishing he'd strip me now.

"Obey me, lovely girl, and I'll take you someplace nice for lunch." He trails kisses along my cheek to the side

of my neck. "Do as I say, and I'll buy you whatever you want."

I moan when he sucks on my flesh. "Winston."

"Yes, good girl?"

"You're going to ruin me."

"Why's that?"

"Because your lies feel like truth."

"I look forward to making you cry and beg." He nips at my neck. "Now bend over my desk, and show me your ass. Enough talk. I've given you your sweet words. Give me your sweet ass."

I cry out in surprise when he spins me around. My palms hit the surface of his desk with a slap as he pushes me down. A tremble ripples through me at being bent over and at his mercy.

"Show me."

I roll my eyes at his bossiness and yank my skirt up over my ass. His deft fingers hook onto my panties, dragging them down my thighs. They fall to my ankles.

"Rest your face on my desk and use both hands to show me your butt plug," he orders. "Be a good girl, Cinderelliott."

I cringe at having to expose myself so crudely, but something inside me craves his approval. "Are you going to fuck me?"

He laughs. "Always so eager. No."

I flip him off, earning more laughter, before gripping my ass cheeks and pulling them apart. Pressure is applied to the butt plug as he pushes against it.

"Are you happy?" I grumble. "I'm not a liar."

"No, you're not," he agrees. "In fact, I think I should reward you, sweet girl."

I shiver at his words. "Oh yeah?"

"It's a freebie." His fingers brush against my pussy. "You want a freebie, beautiful?"

"Y-Yes," I whisper.

"Beg."

"Please fuck me."

He smacks my butt cheek hard, making my ass clench and sending strange sensations shooting through me. "The freebie isn't my dick, greedy girl."

"You're a tease, Win. A fucking tease."

"Beg me to put my fingers inside you."

"Please, for the love of God, finger me."

He chuckles as he runs his knuckle across the opening of my pussy. "You're so wet. Are you always this horny, Miss Elliott?"

"Only since I met you."

"Good answer," he croons as he pushes a finger inside me. "Fuck, look how tight you are."

I gasp as he slowly fucks me with one finger. With the butt plug inside me, it intensifies the feeling.

"I bet that pencil-dick boyfriend you had didn't even properly break you in," he rumbles. "My dick is going to split you wide open, baby. It's going to hurt. You'll cry because you're just a little girl who wants a big man's dick but she's too small to take it."

His filthy words are always so fucked up, but they turn me on more than I'd like to admit.

"Your dick's not that big," I taunt. "Don't oversell yourself."

He pulls his finger out, and then I hear the zipper on his pants go down. I tremble as I anticipate him sliding inside me. When I feel the soft skin of his dick rub against my pussy, I whine, wiggling my butt at him.

"Does this feel small to you?" he murmurs, sliding it over my clit.

"It feels average," I lie.

He hums in disapproval, teasing his tip over my slick entrance. I want him to push inside me. Instead, he rubs against me, never entering.

"Maybe I should put it here." His words are cold as he tugs at the jewel of my butt plug. On reflex, I clench. "Ahh, relax, little one. You wanted to talk a tough game, and now it's time to be tough."

A whine escapes me when he begins pulling on the plug. It burns as he gently tugs it from my ass. He tosses it onto the desk with a loud clank.

"Tell me this feels average," he growls, pressing his tip against my aching asshole. "Tell me."

"I, uh, it's big."

"I said tell me it's average."

"Winston," I breathe, "it's too big to go there."

"No, Ash, it's average. You said so yourself. Beg me to put my average dick in your ass."

"It'll hurt," I croak out.

"Fuck yes it'll hurt, which is why I'm not going to fuck you with it."

His words are confusing.

"I don't know what you want," I whimper.

"I want you to beg for me to fill you with my average dick."

"Win—"

"I have work to do," he says, his words going cold. "Get dressed and—"

"Put your average dick inside me, you piece of shit."

Fire burns through me as he roughly pushes his not-so-average dick past the sore ring of my asshole. I scream, uncaring that Deborah can hear, and grip the desk as he painfully drives into me. It's a slow push that hurts like a motherfucker. Tears leak from my eyes, messing up my makeup. His dick is too big. I sob, overcome with pain and embarrassment.

Why do I ask for this?

Why do I allow it?

He doesn't move. He doesn't fuck me. He doesn't pull out.

No, the awful bastard strokes my hair like I'm a kitten.

"If I were to fuck you with no lube, I would tear your pretty ass up and make you bleed. You have no fucking idea what sort of restraint it takes to not do exactly that. I'm there. Inside you. Owning you."

My body trembles as I cry. I can't form words.

"But I'm not some teenage douchebag like your last boyfriend," he rumbles. "This is just a freebie. To let you know what sort of dick you're dealing with. It's a preview before the main event. One day, I'll fill this pretty ass up with my come. Today, you just get to feel it." His hand works its way beneath me, seeking out my clit. Stars glitter in my vision as he rubs me there. "I want to feel you come with my dick buried in your ass. Then, you dirty, filthy fucking girl, I want you to wear my come all over your pretty face."

"Win," I sob.

"And you'll do it, won't you? Because you crave this goddamn crazy shit. Because you're just as sick as me."

He pinches and tugs and rubs at my clit until I lose all sense of reality. I come while crying, my ass clenching painfully around his too-big dig. As I'm shuddering, he roughly pulls out, making me scream.

"Get on your knees," he growls. "You've made a mess of your face. It's only right I do it too."

My body shakes as I stand and shove my skirt back down. When I go to reach for my panties, he shakes his head.

"Leave them at your ankles." He strokes his dick, his cruel stare drinking in every mascara-stained tear. "On your knees. Open your mouth like a greedy bird."

I lower myself to my knees, hating how degrading this feels. I'm doing it for free, too. That's what's even more fucked up. I could leave. Right now, I could storm out of here and out of his life and that would be the end.

Why won't I leave?

"Open your lips and stick out your tongue," he orders. "Taste all the come you've wasted that could be running out of your ass if it weren't for your inability to be a real woman. You're just a little girl who desperately craves a daddy."

"Fuck you," I snap.

His lips curl into a vicious grin. "There she is. Good girl."

My heart lurches, making me hate myself for being so moldable and weak.

"I hate you," I whisper.

He strokes my hair. "Oh, sweetheart, I most certainly do not hate you. You're the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to me."

I open my mouth and stick out my tongue, stupidly eager for his come, because it's what he's asked for, and I want to please him.

Messed up.

So messed up.

His thumb strokes my wet cheek in a loving way that sets my soul on fire. I flutter my eyes closed as salty come hits my tongue. It splatters my cheek and forehead, some landing in my hair. I'm a mess. A mess he made, and I don't care.

"Stay right there," he orders.

I remain still until I sense him crouching in front of me. With gentle, caring movements, he cleans my face off with tissue. When all the come and tears are gone, he presses a kiss to my lips.

"You're going to break me, Ash. It's going to destroy the man I've fought so hard to become." He pulls away to study me. "And, beautiful, I can't find it in me to give a damn."

19

WINSTON

Ash Elliott is going to kill me.

There's no doubt about it. Seeing her wrecked and messy earlier at the office, on her knees dutifully obeying me will be the ultimate way to die. I'll drop dead of a heart attack one day because the sight is so fucking perfect I can't even handle it.

Which, naturally, makes me an utter monster.

A villain.

Despicable.

I should hate myself for wanting to ruin such a pretty, funny, bright young thing. Instead, I simply count down to the moment when I can do it again.

I will do it again.

Each time I break a little piece of her, it draws her closer to me. I've always been someone coldhearted and untouchable, but by giving herself so freely to me, I have a duty that's etched into the marrow of my bones to protect and care for her.

I get to wreck her so I can fix her.

It's the vicious cycle we've found ourselves in, and I'm not one of those creatures who embraces change. No, I loathe it. So this perverse, infinite circle will continue on, growing momentum each time we round another curve of depravity.

"Did you enjoy your food?" I ask, nodding at her barely-touched plate.

Her face is makeup free, and the hairs around her face have begun to lose their straightness and have frizzed slightly. After I came all over her pretty face, she spent a good half-hour in the bathroom washing her face and doing whatever the fuck else. If I had to guess, psyching herself up to quit on me. But the moment she exited the bathroom, I pounced on her with a heated kiss, some much-needed words of praise, and an invitation to lunch.

"It's good. I'm not that hungry." She fidgets in her seat, staring out the window of the tiny bistro we've found ourselves in.

"You want to talk about what happened?"

Her hazel eyes fly to mine. "Not really."

"I'll pay a thousand dollars for this conversation."

"Not everything has a price tag," she hisses, her spine going rigid.

"Perhaps," I agree, "but many things do. You and I work well on this system. Don't quit on me now."

She lets out a heavy sigh. "I get that you like to humiliate me but . . ."

"But what?"

"It makes me feel used." She bites on her bottom lip. "Afterwards, I feel . . . unlike myself."

I study her for a long minute. "That's your insecurities speaking. I can assure you, when I shell out thousands of dollars for what you give to me, I don't for a second feel used."

"But it's weird, Winston. It's weird we're doing this together."

"I'm sorry to burst your bubble, baby, but it's not that weird. People all have their different kinks. Unfortunately, until now, I haven't been able to find someone who matches up to me perfectly."

"I don't like it," she argues, her brows furrowing. "It makes me feel gross."

I reach across the table and take her hand. She softens when I give it a squeeze. My thumb caresses her soft flesh as I admire her sweet, pouty lips.

"I hate to break it to you, but you enjoy it. It embarrasses you that you do, but your pussy doesn't lie, Ash."

She looks over her shoulder, as though making sure no one heard my crude words. It pleases me her face blushes crimson. "Fine," she whispers. "I guess, to a certain degree, I do like it. But that's fucked up, Win. Why do I like it? How do I live with myself?"

I let go of her hand and pull out my wallet. After setting a few bills on the table, I stand and help her to her feet. She links her arm with mine.

"You're my pleasure partner," I say, amusement in my tone as we exit the bistro. "It's an agreement between us. We sort out the details. It's something we play together. Our games. No one else's. As long as I'm

happy and you're happy, does it really matter if it's weird or not a kink you're familiar with?"

She stops and looks up at me once we're outside. The sun shines on her pretty face, highlighting a splash of freckles on her nose. "It makes me feel like you don't like me. Like I'm just this thing you want to hurt and come all over."

I stand facing her and cup her cheeks with my hands. "Look at me and hear me well." She nods, her hazel eyes wide and searching mine for answers. "I want you for so much more than that."

Her bottom lip trembles. "But you didn't want me to sleep in your bed. After everything . . . I thought . . ."

So young.

"That's my issue, not yours," I say gently. "I've been ice cold my entire life. Thawing for you is something I crave, but it won't be easy." I kiss her supple lips that taste like the lemonade she drank at lunch. "I'll try to be warmer for you. This is give and take after all. You've been giving so graciously, so it's only fair I give back." I take her hand in mine and thread our fingers together. "Do you like this?"

A shy smile tugs at her lips. "It seems cheesy after what we did today."

"My girl likes cheese with her whine." I lean forward and nip at her bottom lip. "Now let me buy you a present."

Her eyes roll and she shakes her head. "You don't have to buy me anything."

"I'm a rich old man with nothing better to spend his money on. Indulge me, Cinderelliott. Besides, you have a birthday party to attend not this weekend but the next. I can't have you showing up and not looking the part."

"The part? Your assistant? Your maid?"

I bark out a laugh. "We both know you're much more than that."

It isn't until we begin walking toward some high-end shops that I speak again. "My birthday party will be an over-the top affair my mother puts on. She's obsessed with spoiling her children on their birthdays and rubbing it in everyone's faces that they're not a Constantine. Everyone praises her while she parades her children around like exotic pets no one is allowed to touch. It's been this way since my first birthday, and it's this way for every Constantine child."

"My birthdays were certainly nothing like that," she comments. "Sounds intense."

"You have no idea. Everyone will talk about who wore what and who was invited. I've invited your family, but I want to invite you in case Manda hasn't mentioned it."

"She didn't mention it," she grumbles. "No surprise there. I bet she told the Terror Triplets."

"Don't worry, beautiful," I assure her. "They won't be a problem at the party." I stop in front of the dress shop and give her hand a squeeze. "There will be one issue. One I'm not ready to address with my family. I'm a private man."

"I wonder why," Ash deadpans, making me want to bend her over right there and smack her ass.

Ignoring her sassy remark, I blurt out what needs to be said. "As far as everyone's concerned at the party, you're my assistant. Yes, you'll dress much better than anyone there, but we can't show up arm in arm."

Her features fall. "Oh."

"And it's not because of whatever shit you're spinning in your head right now," I growl. "It's because the moment people get wind I'm officially with someone, we'll get hounded. Not just from reporters and magazines but also by my family."

"Okay, I'll Uber there, I guess."

I cringe at the thought of Ash inside a disease-infested shit car in a dress that costs ten grand. "Don't insult me, little girl."

She laughs, sweet and melodic. "It's just, I really enjoy the look on your face whenever I mention Ubers."

"A sadist, I see," I taunt. "Kind of like I enjoy the look on your face when my come is dripping from your eyelashes."

"Win!"

Chuckling, I drag her into the dress shop. As soon as the two women working the store see me, they nearly trip over themselves to assist. I not-so-gently shove Ash toward them.

"Black tie affair," I grunt out. "Something blue for my assistant."

The women flutter around Ash while I plop down in an armchair. Sprawling out, I scratch at my jaw as I watch them fuss over her. I can tell she's not used to getting the star treatment in a shop. My little sisters, Vivian, Elaine, and Finsley are spoiled girls and would already have these ladies rushing all over to accommo

date them. Not Ash. She seems overwhelmed and shoots me a helpless look.

"Get the girl some champagne," I bark out.

One of the women jolts like she's been shocked and scampers off. Ash glares at me. I shrug and then set to taking care of some business on my phone. They parade her in front of me for an hour, choosing more daring choices each time. The thought of her stepbrothers seeing all her skin on display puts me in a really terrible fucking mood.

"No," I grind out. "This is a Constantine party, not a high school prom." I stand, pocket my phone, and then thumb through some more modest selections. "This one."

The woman makes a face. "It's very . . . simple."

"I like that one," Ash chimes in. "It's chic and pretty."

That settles it.

"Put it on, and let me see," I instruct.

"Yes, boss," Ash grumbles, sticking her tongue out at me.

The woman helping her gapes, horrified at her action. I narrow my eyes, giving Ash a look that promises

punishment for her naughty tongue. While Ash dresses in the fitting room, I send some emails.

"This is an Edward Arsouni Couture evening gown. Very elegant," the woman says, suddenly a fan of the dress. "Timeless, really."

Lifting my gaze, I'm pleased with the way it hugs Ash's curves in a tasteful way my mother will approve of. It has three-quarter-length sleeves and is floor length, a rich jacquard-blue with twinkling beaded embellishments.

"Look," Ash says, smoothing her hand over the design. "It's a bird."

"Beautiful. She'll need shoes and a handbag," I tell the women. "Wrap it up."

Ash preens a little, spinning and watching the way the dress swirls around her. Even in a simple dress, she's breathtaking. It'll be difficult hiding the way this girl makes me feel. Mother will sniff it out and demand answers, that's for damn sure.

But unlike most mothers who want their son to find a good girl and get married, my mother will be ready to shred Ash's life hunting for reasons why she isn't good enough. That's exactly why I want to avoid the subject of my seeing someone. Eventually, after Ash attends

enough events with me, it'll become a conversation I'll have to have with Mother, but until then, I'll evade it as long as possible.

Ash goes back into the fitting room. I rise and follow after her, eager to ruffle her feathers a bit. She gasps when I slip through the curtain. Her hazel eyes are wide as she stares at me in the mirror.

"Let me assist," I rumble, stepping close to grab hold of the zipper.

She stills as I unzip the dress. Gently, I push the dress off her shoulders and down her arms. Her tits jiggle in her black bra, looking like two tasty temptations wrapped in sheer lace. I help her out of the dress, ignoring the way my dick strains in my slacks when I get a prime view of her sexy ass in matching panties.

I take the dress from her and hand it to the woman waiting outside the dressing room. She rushes off with it, leaving us in privacy.

"Good girls deserve rewards," I growl as I stalk her way.

She turns, her brow arched high. "Like an eight-thousand-dollar dress?"

"The free kind of reward," I clarify. "Sit on the bench."

"Winston . . ." She frowns. "They'll hear."

"They're busy wrapping up your dress. Let's get to it if you want privacy."

Hesitation flashes over her features before decision settles in her hazel orbs. She sits down on the bench. I kneel down in front of her and wrench her thighs apart.

"Oh, how the mighty hath fallen," she taunts, clearly loving that she thinks she has the upper hand.

"I can still own you from my knees, Cinderelliott. Mark my words."

Dipping down, I inhale her cunt that is fragrant with her arousal. She whimpers when I run my nose over her clit. The lace is wet.

"Dirty girl," I croon. "Always so needy for me."

I lick her pussy over her lacy panties, loving the way she bucks and her head hits the wall behind her. Reaching up, I pull down the cups of her bra to expose her tits to me. At first, I tease her with a tonguing all over her pussy. She squirms and fidgets, clearly needing more.

"I need you," she breathes.

"Not yet." I smirk at her and then nip at her pussy. "Soon."

Lifting her ass with my palms, I maneuver her as I eat her pussy in a teasing way. It would be easier to rip her panties off, but I love that she wants to be penetrated. A sheer piece of fabric keeps my tongue at a safe distance. Her frustration is evident by the ways she wriggles.

I easily bring her to orgasm with just a few urgent strokes of my tongue over her clit. The beautiful girl shudders, shamelessly moaning my name. Once she's good and sated, I rise to my feet and pat her on the top of her head.

"Good girl," I say with a smirk. "I'm sure the whole store heard how fantastic I am with my tongue."

She groans and starts slinging on clothes, flustered over our act. I'm grinning as I exit the dressing room. One of the women stands by awkwardly, her face painted purple with embarrassment.

"A nice tip for your silence about what you think you heard," I say to the woman in a no-nonsense tone.

"Hear what?" she asks, smiling. "Candace will take your card up front."

I leave her be and make my way over to Candace. She swipes my card, and I scribble down a generous tip for the both of them. My phone rings. I groan to see it's Perry.

"Have her meet me outside," I say, tipping my head. "I need to take a call." I answer the call. "What, little brother?"

"Love you too, Winny. You got a second?"

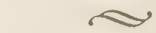
"Depends on what for."

"Something you really want to hear."

"Then I have all the time in the world for you, Perry. Speak and tell me who the Constantines are destroying today."

He laughs which means I'm right. "I've dug up some dirt on the buildings around the Baldridge Plaza building."

News on my plan to fuck over the Morellis. Wonderful. A fantastic addition to an incredible day.



From behind the fence, I watch the Pembroke Preparatory School lacrosse players practicing. I revel in the

taste of victory even though I'm not the one on the field. When you have brains, you don't have much need for sports. The terrible fucking triplets don't have a half a brain between the three of them. If they did, they wouldn't have fucked with Ash.

I'm not sure what their obsession is with her, but it goes beyond being normal overprotective brothers. They're possessive over something that belongs to me.

Big fucking mistake.

Sparrow and Sully aren't the worst of the three. Since that day I had to rescue her from them in the restaurant bathroom, I've had Deborah dig up all she can on them.

Scout is the ringleader.

Monster in charge.

The one who I'll enjoy ruining the most.

As though he senses his name inside my head, he trots to a stop on the field, his eyes squinting as he scans the parking lot past the fence. I know it's Scout, because he's the only one of the three who looks like a serial killer in the making.

I tip my head at him, smirking.

Got you, motherfucker.

When he realizes he's not going to Harvard, no matter how much money his mommy throws at the institution, he'll remember this moment. He'll remember me. It'll be absolutely clear who did that to him.

Based on the psychopathic expression on his face, he'll try and retaliate once he realizes the damage I've inflicted. He'll come after *me* this time as he should. Man to man. I'll be ready for him, too. If I have to shred every part of his life to make a goddamn point, I will. I can already tell this fucker is going to test me.

Bring it on, kid.

20

ASH

I'm in too deep. After Winston and I left the dress shop a week and a half ago, we've fallen into a depraved pattern. One that sinks lower and deeper each day. So low, I'm not sure I'll ever dig myself out. I'm not sure I even want to.

It's not about the money anymore.

I have more than enough for my first year of college. Just over a hundred grand thanks to Winston. It was hard, strange work on my part, but I earned every dirty dime.

Now, it's about him.

About us.

It's messy and complicated. He enjoys filming his wicked acts. I like watching them when he's busy with a client or asleep. Just like he predicted, I get myself off watching them. It's incredibly erotic hearing my moans as he says degrading crap to me and makes me try new toys.

It's complicated because he still won't spend a whole night in my bed and after being turned down several nights in a row, I don't ask to go to his. I hate the closed-off feeling I get from him after we've gone down our dirty hole. He's able to erect his walls and continue being the same unflappable Winston Constantine. I, however, shed more layers of myself each time. All that's left is a bare, vulnerable version of myself nearly desperate for his affection.

We also haven't slept together.

He's only entered me the one time, in his office. It was a brutal invasion of my ass that left me sore for days. This, too, feels like a rejection.

Tonight, it all changes. I have a plan. I'm going to seduce him.

Even though I have no idea how that will go down, I plan on attempting it anyway. I'm almost tempted to fish out Perry's business card from my purse in an

effort to pull information out of him about Winston. Maybe if I know more about his past, I can go into this thing well-armed. But, knowing Winston, it'd probably just piss him off. I want to have sex with him, not send him running.

Every time I try and analyze why I want to sleep with the villainous monster, I can't pinpoint a reason. I've made a list on my phone of pros and cons. The pro list is short while the cons list goes on and on. Still, I want him.

My phone buzzes, and I expect to see a text from Winston. He stayed late at work to meet with Nate and sent me home. Perry gave me a ride and also gave me his card in case I ever needed a friend to talk to. It was sweet, though I feel like Winston won't think so.

Dad: Your dress arrived, sweetheart.

Me: What?

Dad: The one for the Constantine event tomorrow night. Manda said it's a little simple, but she's hired a stylist to come over at five to do your hair and makeup to make you stand out.

Gee, thanks, Dad, for believing Manda that I'll be the most boring belle at the ball without her swooping in to save the day.

Rather than saying what I think because it'll be wasted breath since he's so in love with her, I type out a different reply.

Me: The dress was supposed to come to Winston's.

I pause to think after I send the text. I'd been so flustered after the orgasm Winston gave me, I wasn't paying too much attention when Tara, the dress clerk, asked me where to deliver the dress and accessories.

Crap.

Me: Oh no. I think I messed up.

Dad: It worked out then since Manda has graciously offered her stylist. I miss you anyway. Look forward to seeing you.

My heart clenches at getting a small glimpse of the dad who raised me.

Me: Miss you too, Dad. Love you.

Dad: Same, sweetheart.

I open Winston's text conversation and send him what I hope will be the first step in my seduction.

Me: I want to negotiate a deal.

His response is immediate.

Winston: What do you want, little girl?

Me: You. I'm willing to pay for it too.

Winston: You want to pay me to have sex with you?

I try not to cringe at how crazy it sounds. But I relax knowing he's probably smiling and hoping I'm embarrassed by his words.

Me: Yes. 50k.

Winston: That's expensive, Ash. You have college to think about . . .

Me: I'll earn more later. Whatever you want, I'll do it. I need this.

Winston: What happened to a freebie?

Me: I have certain requests . . .

Winston: Oh?

Me: I want you to treat me like you're going to keep me forever.

Winston: Needy fucking girl.

Me: And I want to sleep in the bed with you. All night long. If you abandon me, you forfeit the money.

Winston: It's just money.

Me: Fine, if you abandon me, you forfeit me.

Winston: Elaborate, brat, because you're starting to piss me off.

A flare of heat burns through me, pooling in my gut.

Me: I need this, Win. These are my terms.

Winston: Time for me to negotiate . . .

Me: Name your terms.

Winston: I'll discount it by half if you let me call you names and make you cry.

I should not get a thrill from his words but damn if I'm not turned on.

Me: Doable.

Winston: I'll knock five more off if we film it.

Me: Deal. Oh, and I get to see you fully naked. Add five back on for that.

Winston: Write 'Winston's Dirty Whore' on your stomach, wait on the bed naked, and I'll discount it by ten.

Me: So fifteen for a mean fuck where you degrade me but you'll hold me all night?

Winston: And I'm coming inside you.

Thank God I remembered to get back on the pill last week, because I want nothing more than him to do just that.

Me: Deal.

Winston: I'm on my way.

I toss my phone on the dresser and then go on a hunt for a Sharpie. I can't believe we've negotiated this deal. It's so fucked up, but I want him. I need to feel this connection between us. Quickly, I make my way into his condo office. Of course, his office at home is just as immaculate as his one at Halcyon. I stop to admire a photo of his family when his father was living. This

week, knowing I'll have to see his family tomorrow, I've researched all I could about them. His father died in an accident five years ago, and the family has been fractured ever since.

I locate the black Sharpie and then rush back to my room. After stripping, I awkwardly write "Winston's Dirty Whore," though it's hard to read because it's difficult to write upside down. Once I finish, I send a picture that coincidentally has a picture of my tits too. Like he promised, he continues to pay me for pictures, but he pays a lot more for the ones with nudity.

I receive money from him before a response.

Typical Winston.

Winston: Anyone ever tell you you're wife material?

I roll my eyes but secretly preen at his words. Just like he needs to say depraved shit to me, I need his praise. He layers it on thick, and it's always bullshit, but I still love it, nonetheless.

Me: Yeah, some guy in the elevator earlier . . .

When he doesn't reply right away, I have a flare of panic as I imagine him firing every person who works in the building.

Me: Kidding! Abort mission to kill everyone.

Winston: I'm whipping your ass with the belt for that one.

Me: No way!

Winston: I'll buy you a car.

Me: Winston! You can't buy me a car for whipping my ass!

Winston: Anything you want. It's yours. I get to make it hurt . . .

I'm so sick.

So, so sick.

Me: You're over the top. Maybe I'd let you do it for free.

Winston: And give you a chance to pussy out? Fuck no. I want an iron-clad agreement. My belt gets you whatever the fuck

you want. You need a car anyway. You're giving me ulcers with your Uber threats.

I laugh as I crawl onto the bed and wait for him.

Me: Fine. As long as you coddle me after and make me feel loved.

He sends me a bunch of eyeroll emojis.

Winston: Little girls are so fucking high maintenance.

Me: You're the one who started this fucked-up ride. Too late to get off now. We're going full-speed ahead.

Winston: Fine. I'll baby your ass. Happy?

I send him heart-eye emojis that earn more eyeroll emojis.

I'm laughing until I hear the front door open. Shrimp sings happily from the living room. He always has a special chirp for Winston. Winston doesn't get it, but it's a big deal. Shrimp doesn't warm up to people easily, but he likes Winston.

"Look how fucking dirty you are," he growls as he enters the room. "Striking deals for sex. You're wicked, Miss Elliott. Give me your phone." I toss it to

him, and he sets it to record before arranging it on the dresser.

I drink in his handsome appearance. He's hot in a three-piece light-gray suit that makes his blue eyes pop. His dark blond hair is styled in his usual perfect way, and he's sporting a small amount of scruff that I crave to feel between my thighs.

When he starts undoing his belt, heat floods through me. I love the efficient way he unbuckles it, a feral glint in his intense eyes. My heart stutters in my chest when he whips the belt off with a swoosh.

"Your butt plug still in?" he asks, his brows furrowed.

"Yep."

His lips curl into an evil smirk. "How's that new size working out for you?"

"Once it's in, I barely notice it."

"You wish it were my dick instead."

"Don't flatter yourself. That hurt. Definitely not looking forward to that ever again."

He barks out a laugh. "Too damn bad. I'm fucking that ass soon. I might even do it tonight." He arches a brow in challenge, but I don't back down.

"It's not a part of this negotiation, but you can work it in to the next one."

"Flip over and bring me that ass."

I scoot down toward the end of the bed, hanging my legs off, and then twist until I'm on my stomach. His palm runs down my back and then he squeezes my butt cheek. Then, he playfully tugs on the butt plug. I groan at the sensation. It's too big to just pop out. This size takes work to get out.

"Hold onto the covers, Ash. Scream all you want. No one can save you from the villain."

I squirm, a nervous thrill trembling through me. "Maybe I don't want to be saved."

"You're a pathetic damsel in distress," he bites out. "Needy and desperate for an old man's attention."

His mean words make my pussy throb. I can't begin to understand why my body responds to this like it does.

"I'm going to stripe your white ass," he rumbles. "If you want to quit, you tell me 'I quit' so I can stare at what a fucking disappointment you are."

"I won't quit, motherfucker."

He chuckles, teasing my ass with the leather of his belt. "Liar."

"I can handle whatever you give to me. You just . . .you just . . ."

"I know," he bites out. "Kiss you and tell you you're pretty. You're so predictable, little girl. A needy, bratty child whose daddy doesn't love her so she has to find a new daddy. One who spanks her disobedient ass and makes her behave."

I shudder with anticipation. "You're the one fucking a girl barely out of high school. You can't shame me when you're worse—"

Slap!

Fire tears across my butt cheeks, making me clench painfully around the plug in my ass. Instant tears burn my eyes. I'm barely able to clutch onto the covers before he slams the leather back down over my sore ass.

"Ahh!" I scream, the tears freely leaking now.

He hits me again, this time striking the backs of my thighs. I sob uncontrollably, my mind muddied by the pain.

"Say the words, little girl. Tell me to quit."

I shake my head, defying him. Fire tears across my ass again. My entire body trembles as I cry hysterically. I choke on my breath, trying desperately to suck in air.

"Needy,"—*slap!*—"needy,"—*slap!*—"whore!"

I start to crawl away, unable to take anymore. He grabs my ankle, dragging me roughly back to the edge. I yank on the covers hoping to hold on but fail.

"I need the words," he growls. "Say them and it ends."

Shaking my head, I brace myself for more.

One. Two. Three. Four.

My ass hurts so much, I can't breathe. I don't understand why I'm so stubborn I can't just say that I quit.

"You're stubborn as fuck. Like a petulant child. You don't want a lover, you want someone to spank you and boss you around. You want me to wipe your ass too, kinky bitch? You'd probably get off on that shit." He tosses the belt on the ground. "Sit on that sore ass. I need to see your messy face."

I quickly scramble to obey him, hiccupping through my tears. He grabs hold of my hair, jerking my head back so I can stare up at him.

"Does it hurt?" he growls.

I squeeze my eyes shut, sending tears leaking out as I croak out, "Yes."

"Good." He smacks my cheek. "Look at me."

I'm blinking in shock that he smacked me. Not hard, just enough to get my attention. Lately, I've been reading up on erotic humiliation. Turns out, we're not that weird. Apparently, getting whipped is a turn on for a lot of people.

Including me.

"You like that, you dirty fucking girl." His dark blue eyes flash with appreciation and lust. "I give you work to do at my company, but you slack off watching porn."

"I don't—"

He smacks me again. "Remember, I have access to your computer. I get to see all the sites you go to, little girl."

"I just wanted to learn." I pout, loving the way his nostrils flare.

"You like getting smacked around, don't you?"

I nod, swallowing down the shame. "As long as you hold up your end of the deal after."

"You're fucked up," he growls. "You should see a fucking shrink."

But he's fucked up too.

His arousal is evident in the way his dick tries to burst from his slacks.

"Lie back," he barks. "I can read your dirty mind. You want me to smack your pussy."

My core clenches, and I nod. His lips curl up on one side, pleased by my agreement.

"You know what I require at the end," I choke out. "Do whatever it takes to get us there."

He tugs at the knot of his tie. "You've unleashed a monster, you dumb, dumb girl."

21

WINSTON

She smiles.

The beautiful, messy girl smiles at my words.

This is how I know I'll never come back from this. From her. It's how I know I'm going to spend every dime of my fortune to keep her safe and mine.

Because she likes this.

So many women I've been with had promise of a relationship like ours, but they always got scared off when we barely scratched the surface.

Not Ash.

Ash lays her vulnerabilities at my feet, knowing I can stomp on them. She trusts me not to. Instead, I laugh at

them and ridicule them. Maybe even kick them around. But, after, I help her pick them back up and put them where they go.

It works for us.

Deliciously so.

I'm growing too obsessed with her. I've begun to not care about shit with my company or the city I rule over. I only care about her and the wicked games we play.

I smack her pussy, loving how she cries out and shudders.

"Rub it while I undress. I'm sure you're going to climax when you see me naked since you're so fucking obsessed with the idea of it," I taunt as I shed my tie and then jacket. "Touch your pussy, my filthy whore who does dirty shit for money. Make yourself come while you watch me."

She captures her lip between her teeth, rubbing furiously at her clit, drinking me in. I slowly pluck through each button. Her eyes track the movement greedily. I undo my cuff links and then strip out of my shirt. She sucks in a deep breath when I tease the undershirt out of my pants where it's tucked in. I reveal my toned abs, enjoying the fuck out of how she rubs faster at her pussy.

"Stop," I bark out.

She groans but yanks her hand away. So fucking hot. Her pussy is open and exposed, glistening with need. Red and ripe for tasting. Her jeweled butt plug shimmers in the light.

I smack her pussy three hard times in a row, only stopping when she moans. One more hit and she would have come.

"Rub that needy clit but don't come," I instruct. I whip off my undershirt and start pulling off my slacks. "Good girl."

Her eyes roll back and her thighs tremble. "Win," she whines. "Please."

"No," I say. "Pull your hand away."

"Asshole," she grumbles but obeys.

I kick off my dress shoes and peel off my socks once my slacks are gone. Finally, I give the needy girl what she wants and take off my boxers.

"Happy now?"

"Yep." She grins, looking hot as fuck with mascara-smeared tears ruining her pretty face.

I walk over to her and stroke my dick. "Tell me how much you want me. How much you need my money. How you'll do anything to please me."

"I want you—"

"No," I bark out. "Tell me while you rub your clit."

She happily brings her hand back to her pussy. Her gaze is locked on mine as she rubs at herself. "I need you, Winston. I want you."

"Not good enough." I smack her tits one right after the other. "Tell me more."

"I love how you give me money and take away my fear of providing for myself. I love how you buy me clothes and food. I love how you gave me a job and let me spend the night sometimes."

"You're using me for my money," I taunt. "Just like I'm using you to degrade. That's all this is."

"It's more," she argues.

"It's not." I smack her cunt again. "Admit we're just using each other."

"No."

"Stubborn girl. Make yourself come because I'm about to make you scream."

She rubs shamelessly on her clit and then comes with a yelp, her chest turning blotchy red from the effort. Before she can finish, I grab her hips and flip her over. I take hold of my throbbing cock and tease at her soaked flesh. With a hard thrust of my hips, I drive all the way into her, making her scream at the top of her lungs.

Fuck.

She's so tight, and with that giant fucking butt plug crammed up her ass, it's strangling my cock.

"Win, ow, oh God," she chokes out.

I slam into her ruthlessly, nearly coming with each deep dive into her tight, hot body. Twisting my fingers into her hair, I jerk her upright. I grope her jiggling tit as I fuck her like a madman.

"Rub your pussy, baby," I growl. "This is going to go quick. I've waited too fucking long to have this pussy."

She whimpers but furiously rubs at her clit. I pinch and pull on her hardened nipples. The moment she comes, I lose all sense of sanity. A roar rips from me as I grind into her, come shooting deep inside her. Her pussy milks my cock as she climaxes hard.

I yank out of her, my dick slinging come over her thighs, and I push her down onto the bed. She bounces,

her ass clenching. I take hold of the end of the butt plug and begin working it out of her ass. I'm drained of my orgasm and my dick is softening, but I'm not done with her. After some sobs on her part, I manage to free her of the enormous plug. Her tight ass finally releases it, tightening back to a tiny rosebud like it didn't just have a fat plug inside it.

With my fingers, I scoop up the come dripping from her pussy and rub it all over her asshole. She whimpers and shakes her head, which only makes me want it more. I get a thrill of power when she starts to cry. I push my finger into her ass, enjoying the fuck out of the way her body easily accepts me. Another finger follows the first, making her squeal. My dick is hard as stone again, not ready for our time together to be done.

"Win," she begs. "You promised to cuddle after."

"We're not done yet."

I smear my come leaking from her all over my dick. Then, I remove my fingers from her hole to replace it with the tip of my dick. She screams in pain, but I slide in much easier than my first encounter here. Easily I glide in and out despite the way she clenches around me. I smack her sore, red-striped ass as I fuck her without remorse.

"You're the most beautiful girl in the world," I croon. "Fucking gorgeous."

She melts like I knew she would. I caress her ass and hips and back. Sweat drips down my temple as my nuts tighten. This time, my release is less of a fucking waterfall. Still, it fills her tight ass up with me.

The time for wild and ruthless is over.

I made a promise.

Gently, I ease out of her. Her body shudders as she cries softly while I turn off our recording. I walk into the bathroom and then start the shower, turning it to hot, before I fetch my girl. She's still in the same, awkward, used position. With a playful smack to her ass, I urge her to roll over. Then, I scoop her into my arms.

"My little girl needs babying," I tease, dropping a kiss to her puffy lips. "Don't you?"

She nods, clinging to me. I carry her into the walk-in shower and under the spray. Once I set her to her feet, I dote on her like she clearly craves. I wash and condition her hair first. After, I soap down every part of her sore body. My own body I wash quickly.

"What do you need?" I ask, hugging her to me.

"This."

I stroke my fingers up and down her back. "You make me fucking insane. So insane, baby."

"Yeah?"

"I go crazy with the need to destroy you so I can put you back together again."

"As long as you always promise to fix me after you break me."

"I'll try."

She snuggles closer. "I'm going to fall in love with you, Win. It's going to hurt, isn't it?"

Because she doesn't think I can love her back.

"It's going to hurt. Everything with me hurts."

Her body trembles and she sniffles. "I like your brand of hurt."

"I'll never be a Prince Charming," I remind her. "I'll always be a villain both in and out of bed. I can offer you a bitter taste of sweet, but it'll always be brief and fleeting."

"You're not as mean as you claim you are, Constantine."

"No, I'm much worse, brat. Much worse."

We remain quiet for a long while, her clinging to me and me massaging her back. Eventually, I grow tired of standing and help the exhausted girl from the shower. It amazes me that such a simple effort, such as toweling her dry, has her gazing at me with stars in her eyes. She truly craves this gentle coddling after. I guess, in a way, I kind of like taking care of her too. Absolves some of the guilt for making her cry.

Once we're dry, I tuck her into bed and then turn off all the lights.

"Win?" my needy girl cries out.

"Yes, brat?"

"You're still going to sleep with me, right?"

I chuckle as I finish locking up for the night. "All part of the deal, Cinderelliott."

Crawling into the bed with her, I wrap an arm around her and bury my nose in her damp hair. I like how her small body fits in the curve of mine. My dick likes it too, hard again and pressed against the crack of her ass, but I don't try for another round. She'd probably pass out mid-fuck. And as kinky as I am, I don't want to fuck an unconscious girl.

"Win?"

"Go to sleep."

She smacks my arm, and I grin in the dark.

"What is it, precious?" I taunt.

"Don't be a dick."

"Stop mouthing and say what you have to say."

"Have you ever loved a girl before?"

I refrain from rolling my eyes. "No."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like people."

"You like me."

"Barely."

She laughs and twists to face me. I touch her hair in the dark, smoothing it from her face. My lips press to hers, seeking them out easily in the darkness.

"I really liked a woman," I find myself admitting aloud. "When I was young."

She grows quiet. "Oh yeah?"

"I thought maybe I might ask her to marry me." I scoff. "I was wrong."

"Why? What happened?"

"Dad said no."

She gasps. "You didn't ask the girl you almost loved to marry you because your dad said no?"

"Yep."

"What did your mom say?"

I try to extricate myself from her hold, but she's like a fucking monkey, gripping on tight. I give up the fight and sigh heavily. "Mom had enough of my wallowing in pity and made it her sole mission to pull up every horrible thing Meredith ever did."

"Meredith." She says the name like she's jealous of it, which amuses me. "What did your mom dig up?"

"Meredith had an abortion when she was sixteen. It was kept hush-hush. We started seeing each other when I was eighteen. During that time, Mother discovered Meredith had sex with Vincent Morelli."

"No," she gasps. "A Morelli? That bitch!"

"You're Team Constantine now, huh?"

"Through and through. Which Morelli is Vincent?"

"Leo's uncle."

"Ew? She fucked an old man when she had eighteen-year-old you?"

"Allegedly."

"So your dad made you break up with her, and your mom drove a spike through your bleeding heart?"

"It's the Constantine way," I say with a dark chuckle.

"It's cruel."

"Mother also obtained text records of Meredith plotting with her sister to accidentally get pregnant with my baby."

"What?"

"Meredith just wanted my money. Dad knew, and Mom proved it."

"I'm sorry," she says. "Technically, I want your money too. Your mom is going to hate me."

I stroke my fingers through her messy, wet hair. "But you're a greedy girl. You want more than money. You want my fucking heart like it's negotiable."

"I'm tenacious."

"Needy. The word is needy."

"You like it," she taunts.

"As long as you keep letting me whip your ass and then fucking it, I'll tell you whatever you need to hear, baby."

"For the record, Win, I can tell when you feed me bullshit lines and when you mean it. You mean it a lot more than when you don't."

"You think you know everything, little girl."

"I know enough."

"Go to sleep."

She's quiet for a bit, and I almost fall asleep until she speaks again.

"Whatever happened to Meredith?"

"She married Duncan Baldridge."

I smirk as I think about how much hell I've put the Baldridge family through. Most recently, involving Leo Morelli by selling the Baldridge Plaza building.

"I hope she has a miserable life," Ash says. "She deserves it."

"It's quite miserable indeed." I laugh. "It pleases me endlessly."

Satisfied by my answer, she cuddles against me and soon falls asleep. I can't relax, though. The last girl I slept with on the regular almost twenty years ago, I learned she betrayed me. I barely survived it back then. I certainly won't survive it this time.

Because as much as I thought I cared about Meredith . . .

It was only one tiny sliver of the way I feel about Ash.

This bratty, needy girl in my arms is going to destroy my life, and I'm going to fucking let her.

And Mother will rub it in my face once more.

22

ASH

"You can't sleep all day."

I crack my eyes open and squint at the fully dressed figure looming over my bed.

Winston Constantine.

My villainous lover.

"What time is it?" I grumble. "When did you get up?"

"Some of us get up with the birds." He snatches the blanket and yanks it off my body. "Or should I say one particularly loud bird. How do you sleep through that noise?"

"It's not noise. He's singing."

"He should take lessons. Get up and showered." His fingers brush over my stomach where the Sharpie still stains my skin.

Winston's Dirty Whore.

"I'll drop you off at your house on the way to the Constantine Compound," he says, making his way over to my closet. "Call me if your idiot brothers give you trouble."

"Step," I mutter. "Dad and Manda will be there getting ready too. And her stylist."

"Good." He pulls a dress off the hanger and tosses it onto the bed. "Wear this and the sandals you wore to dinner the other day. The nude Jimmy Choos. I like the way they make your calves look."

I sit up on my knees and drink in his handsome appearance. He's back to wearing another impeccable suit without a hair out of place. There's a certain rigidity to him that I understand to be nerves.

Climbing off the bed, not bothering to cover my nakedness since he's seen it all, I approach him and hug him from behind. He's stiff at first and then relaxes slightly.

"Happy birthday, Win."

He allows me to hold him for all of thirty seconds before he's extricating himself from me. Win's not the best cuddler. Apparently, he's even worse when he's stressed.

"We don't have all day. Mother wants me to come over early for a drink and pictures. *Vanity Fair* will be doing a piece." He walks over to the dresser, tidying up a pile of cherry Starburst into a neat stack before he grabs my phone and unplugs it from the charger. "I'll entertain myself while I wait."

As much as I'd love to crawl into his lap and watch the video we made last night, I do need to shower and dress. If I want to look the part of Winston Constantine's personal assistant and lover, I need to put some effort into it. I don't need to give his mother any added ammunition on what will be a hate brigade against me. I have enough haters.

After a quick shower, I pull my wet hair into a messy bun, knowing the stylist will want to dry it. I forgo the makeup and pull on some undergarments, all the while listening to the hot sounds of our feral lovemaking from the night before. Winston looks good enough to eat with an erection straining in his slacks as he leans against the doorjamb watching my phone with an evil smirk on his face. Once I'm dressed, I walk over to him and peek at it. He's at the part where he's in my ass,

pounding into me like he hates me. My skin burns hot at seeing the two of us together. It makes me want to watch the whole thing.

"We could be late," I murmur, peeking at him through my lashes.

His jaw clenches, and his blue eyes flash. "As much as I want to make you cry, little girl, and destroy your sore asshole, I have responsibilities. If you please me tonight at the birthday bash, I'll reward you with my dick down your pretty throat."

I lick my lips. "Promise?"

"I always follow through on my threats," he rumbles, his lips curling into a sinister grin. "You, of all people, know this."

I enter the brownstone to a bustle of activity. There are people rushing about, dressing the triplets in the living room and doing last-minute alterations. Dad is nowhere to be found. I'm nearly knocked over by Manda, fully dressed in a low-cut evening gown, as soon as I start for the stairs.

"Seriously, Ash!" she bellows. "You're a hot mess, and we only have a few hours until your limo arrives. Get upstairs and do something about that hair!"

I yelp in surprise when her nails dig into my bicep and she starts dragging me up the steps. "You're going to bruise me, Manda!"

"That's why they created makeup, darling. Now get to drying your hair," she snaps, hauling me into my bedroom.

I drop my bag on the bed and scowl at her. "Where's the stylist?"

"She had a family emergency." Manda smiles at me in the same corrupt way her sons do. "Looks like you're on your own. Don't embarrass me."

"Unbelievable," I mutter. "When will the limo be here?"

"Five. If you're not ready, I've instructed him to leave. You won't make a mockery out of my family by showing up late."

It's only a quarter past two. That's plenty of time to doll myself up. Of course, I won't look as fancy as I could had I used the stylist, but it'll have to do. I just hope Winston's mother doesn't notice.

"Bye, Manda," I bite out. "I have to get ready now."

She regards me coolly before storming from my room, slamming the door in the process. I make my way into the bathroom and set to drying my hair. It takes forever because it's thick and long, but I manage to get it dry. I decide to do loose curls and use my flat iron to do each piece. I waste an hour and a half making my hair look better than any stylist could ever do. I'm quite pleased with the bounciness and wonder if Winston will enjoy running his fingers through it.

I'm nervous about tonight, but I'm also excited. I want to prove to Winston I can stand by his side as someone he can be proud of.

I take a break even though it's now almost four. It shouldn't take long to put on my makeup and dress, but I can't dawdle too much. Sitting on the bed, I dig out my phone and text Winston.

Me: Are you having fun?

Winston: Endless amounts.

Me: You just miss me.

Winston: Don't flatter yourself.

Me: Liar. The stylist had to leave.

Winston: Should I send another?

Me: I'm not a complete idiot. I can do my own hair and makeup.

Winston: Send me a picture.

Me: I'll trade you one.

He sends me a selfie of him scowling. Tons of photographers are milling about behind him in a luscious courtyard. It makes me laugh because he seems miserable. In return, I send him a smiling selfie of myself.

Me: I still have to throw on some makeup and my dress. The limo will be here at five.

Winston: I can't wait to see your face all made up knowing I get to make you cry it off later when you're choking on my dick.

I send him some emojis sticking their tongue out.

Me: I'll send you a picture when I'm done. I expect endless amounts of praise.

Winston: You're the only girl I know who shamelessly begs for compliments. They don't count when you force them out of people.

Laughing, I toss the phone on my bed and head back into the bathroom to do my makeup. I've nearly got it done when Manda charges into the bedroom.

"Are you almost done, Ash? For crying out loud, the limo will be here in fifteen minutes!"

I climb off the bathroom sink and admire my face for a moment. Definitely better than any stylist could do. I spritz on some perfume and then walk into my bedroom to find Manda scowling. She hastily unzips my garment bag and pulls it away to reveal my beautiful dress.

"This dress is an embarrassment," Manda snipes. "You do realize there will be women showing off their breasts and thighs and arms? You'll be dressed like a nun."

"And you do realize Winston chose that dress for me? He likes it, and he likes me."

She narrows her eyes at me. "For the life of me and your father, we can't seem to understand why. Your father thinks it's the sex. You're young and he's older. I tried to tell him that Mr. Constantine seems to value you for your brain and skills, but your father won't hear of it. And honestly, I don't believe Mr. Constantine. Your father is horrified at the prospect Mr. Constan

tine will end things and you'll come unglued with your teenage emotions, clinging to him in a way that'll get you a restraining order." She yanks the dress off the hanger and starts for me. "You cannot do anything to jeopardize this family's social standing with the Constantines. Mr. Constantine has given me an in with his mother since her plastic surgeon is retiring soon. It's a great thing for our family. If he truly does fall for you, a marriage to him will only complete things."

"I can dress myself," I grumble. I don't have much to say about the rest of her bitchy monologue. She's only been somewhat nice to me lately because she wants in good with Winston's family. It saddens me to think Dad thinks Winston is just using me for sex.

But he is, isn't he?

I push those thoughts away. Winston and I have something budding. Something I desperately want to have. We may have found ourselves in this thing through money and exchange of power, but it's already evolving, especially after last night.

With an annoyed huff, I yank off my dress and toss it on the bed. Spinning around, I hold out my hand for her to give me the evening gown. Her critical gaze sweeps down over my undergarments, no doubt

judging the way I can't fill out a bra the way her designer tits can. When she gasps, I roll my eyes. I'm sure she'll say I need liposuction or some other equally demeaning thing.

"What is wrong with you?"

I look down and read the words written on my stomach. Oh crap. Embarrassment licks over my flesh like fire.

"It's just a game we played," I blurt out.

"Your games are going to destroy our family," she snarls. "I'm disgusted, Ash. Well and truly disgusted."

"Winston's not, and that's all you seem to care about," I snap back. "I can dress myself."

She storms out of my room, once again slamming the door. I calm my shaking hand and then pull on my dress and accessories. It takes some acrobatics, but I manage to get my dress zipped up. Once I decide I'll be Winston's worthy date, I grab my camera and snap a few pictures to send to him. He doesn't reply, which means he's busy with the photoshoot.

"You pissed Mom off," a dark voice rumbles.

Whirling around, I glare as Scout enters the room followed by his matching monster clones. They're all

dressed in tuxedos, filling out the material like grown men. In another world, a girl would grow weak in the knees at seeing them like this—handsome and dressed to the nines. My knees are weak for a whole other reason.

Fear.

"Get out of my room," I snap, crossing my arms over my chest. "Now."

Sully walks over to my jewelry box and runs his finger along the top. "Nah, we're here to babysit you per Mom."

"She was so mad, she made Baron drive her to the party," Sparrow reveals as he closes the door behind him. "That means you're stuck riding in the limo with us."

"I'll take an Uber before I ride with you morons," I hiss. "Get the fuck out of my room."

"And let you get away with it?" Scout asks, his voice cold.

"With what?" I demand.

"Screwing us out of Harvard." Scout cracks his neck. "When Mom finds out what you made your boyfriend do, she's going to destroy you."

My blood runs cold. "I don't know what you're talking about."

What did Winston do?

"Holy shit," Sully says, peeking inside the jewelry box and ending all talk of Harvard. "There's a lot of cash in here."

"Don't touch it," I bark out.

He pockets the money and laughs. "Already did. Finders keepers."

Scout approaches me, and I take several steps back. He picks up my phone, holding it out to me. "Unlock it."

"No."

"Don't test me, sis," Scout growls, his eyes nearly black with evil intent. "Unlock the fucking phone."

"Why?" I screech, my voice quivering.

"Mom says you're a paid whore," Sparrow says, digging through my bag and retrieving my laptop. "Are you?"

"Don't touch my stuff!" I start for Sparrow to take my laptop, but Scout grabs my wrist in his brutal grip.

"Let him do his big brother job and check up on you." Scout gives me a shove toward Sully who wraps his arms around my body, trapping my arms.

"Let me go!" I kick my legs out to no avail.

"What's your password?" Sparrow asks.

"Fuck you."

Scout kneels in front of me and grabs my hand. I cry out when he presses my finger to my phone. It unlocks. Just. Like. That.

"Don't," I plead.

Scout rises as he begins perusing through my phone. "Oh, sis, you really fucked up."

Tears well, but I fight them back. "It's none of your business."

"Our sister being a fucking prostitute is every bit our business," Scout snarls. "You're a sick bitch. Holy shit."

I do start to cry when I hear my moans. Winston's cruel words. The whip of the belt. My screams. Sully is hard, his dick pressing into my ass and Sparrow has joined Scout to watch the video.

"He pays you to have sex with him," Scout says, his voice deceptively calm. "Tell Sparrow your password so he can look at your account."

"What are you going to do?" I ask through my tears.

"See just how much our sister's cunt is worth."

"Then what?" I demand.

"Depends on you." Scout's eyes darken with lust. "My silence can be . . . negotiated."

Choking on a sob, I blurt out my password. Sparrow sits down on the bed and begins tapping away. His eyes bug out of his head.

"She's got over a hundred grand." Sparrow whistles. "A high-paid whore."

"We're taking it," Scout growls. "Every dime. You owe us, especially after ruining our chance at Harvard."

"Then take it," I whisper. "Just . . . don't say anything to anyone. Please."

Scout is quiet as he starts mashing buttons. All three of the guys' phones buzz.

"Over thirty grand each," he says with a wicked smile. "Poor Ash is broke now. She'll have to spread her legs some more to make that up."

"Just leave," I beg. "The limo is here. Please."

"You're not coming with us?" Scout asks, his brow arched high.

"I'll find my own ride."

"With no money and no friends and your John already at the party, how do you plan on doing that?" he taunts. "Are you going to walk?"

"I'll figure it out," I snap.

"Sparrow, make the call. Sully and I will deal with her."

I don't know what that means, but I don't want any part of it. I start to scream and kick.

"Winston, I'm sorry, lover but I won't be able to make it to the party," Scout says as he types on my phone. "While it was lovely using you for your money, I won't need it anymore. My brothers will look after me now."

"He'll know that's not me," I spit out.

He shrugs. "Doesn't change the fact you're not going to the party."

My eyes widen in fear as he approaches. He grabs a handful of the hair I spent so much time on, and he yanks me forward. His lips crash to mine in a brutal,

painful kiss that makes my lip bleed. He pulls away and then jerks me out of Sully's grip, pushing me to the floor.

"Grab those scissors," Scout barks out.

I try to scramble to the bathroom on my knees, but Scout steps on my back making me scream at his forcefulness. I shriek when one of them starts cutting my dress.

"If you're a whore, you have to dress like one," Scout explains as though he really is a big brother chiding his younger sister.

I sob and kick out but they're too strong. I'm outnumbered by the Terror Triplets. My legs grow cold as the material is crudely cut away. They roll me onto my back and continue destroying my dress. All the floor-length material is gone having been cut high up my thighs. Sully straddles my stomach and then brings the scissors to my throat.

All my thrashing stops as he scrapes the blade along my neck. He cuts the fabric in a V from the neckline to between my breasts, nearly exposing me. Sparrow returns and grabs my hands, pulling them above my head while Sully holds my legs down. I've lost all fight and cry deep gut-wrenching sobs.

Scout's face is screwed into a monstrous one as he cuts through the material on my stomach. "Mom was right," he murmurs as he cuts out a square to show off the Sharpie words on my stomach.

He climbs off and towers over me. "Let her go."

As soon as they release me, I curl in on myself, desperate to hide from them. Scout grabs a handful of my hair, dragging me to my feet. He forcefully walks me into the bathroom and yanks open the shower door. I panic, fearing we'll have a repeat of last time. With a hard shove, he sends me into the shower floor. My knees skid across the tile, scraping them open.

"Dirty whores need baths. Stay right there and don't fucking move." He turns on the icy cold shower.

With water raining down over the back of my head, I stare at the tiles that are smeared with blood. My entire body trembles, and I remain still, listening for sounds of them leaving. I'm not sure how long I wait, shivering with my teeth chattering, but I eventually hear a knock.

"Help," I croak out.

The shower door opens, and the water shuts off.

"Oh, you poor, poor girl," a deep, masculine voice croons. "Let me grab you a towel."

A warm towel wraps around me and someone picks me up. I'm carried into my bedroom and the person lays me down. He sits beside me, stroking my wet hair from my face.

Dark eyes. Dark hair. Dark intentions.

I know him.

The guy from the club.

Leo Morelli.

"I had to see you again," Leo says, running his thumb over my numb bottom lip. "What would possess Winston Constantine to sell a thirty-eight point five million dollar building that he loves very, very much to me? A Morelli?" He chuckles. "I didn't even know what I had in my hands that night at the club. I should've dragged you out of there, kept you locked up tight."

I close my eyes, tears leaking out, and say the one thing I want but won't get. "C-Can y-you c-call W-Winston?"

"Open your eyes, sweetheart."

My eyes are bloodshot and burning but I obey him. His smile is handsome. Terrifying, but handsome. He pets my hair like I'm an injured kitten. Violent intent gleams in his dark orbs.

"W-Why are you here?" I whisper.

"I'm your new best friend." He chuckles. "Your new buddy, Leo."

"I won't sleep with you," I hiss, glowering at him.

He smirks. "Trust me. I don't want to sleep with Constantine leftovers. I do, however, want to give you something."

"What?"

"Silence."

"I don't understand."

"Because you're but a scared little girl," Leo explains. "Which is why you need your brothers to keep quiet about what they found on your phone." He wiggles said phone and pushes it into his shirt pocket. "My silence can be bought."

"Winston has enough money," I throw back. "Name your price."

"We have a negotiator on our hands," he drawls out, amused by my tone. "Some things are priceless." He tugs at a wet strand of my hair. "I don't want Winston's money, I want his mind. And you, girl, are going to get inside it. I want answers. When I come to you with questions, I'll expect you to get me those answers."

Divulging Winston's secrets, personal life, and business dealings to a Morelli is the ultimate betrayal. One I'd never willingly follow through on.

"And if I don't," I challenge, hugging the towel around me.

"I'll do more than embarrass you, my sweet thing." His grin is sinister. "I'll mortify Winston Constantine and his entire family name."

He would die.

His mother would too.

And poor Perry.

There's enough stuff on my phone to cause the biggest scandal New York City has ever seen. I'm not even sure half of what we've done is even legal.

Crap.

I have to be smart about this. I can't just challenge one of this city's biggest monsters without repercussions to myself and everyone around me.

I'll need to think like a Constantine.

Leo Morelli may think I'm a weak, bullied little girl who'll obey his harsh commands, but he's wrong. I'm not as weak as I may seem, especially in my destroyed form at the moment.

"I have one condition," I murmur.

"Only one?"

"Let me make a phone call. Now."

His brow arches. "You think your Prince Charming is going to save you if you can just reach him?"

He's a villain, not a prince.

But I'm not calling him. I refuse to set Winston off on his birthday in front of all those people and his family just so he can fall right into the Morelli trap.

No, I have other plans.

"Those are my terms."

"If you spill this conversation to him," he growls as he stands and begins pacing my room, "I will send those

videos to every news outlet in the world. Your future will be over."

I study the monstrous man. His jaw clenches, and his dark eyes flash with . . . something. Unease. Nervousness. Fear. It's so brief you almost miss it. Most people are probably afraid to look this man in his eyes and don't see the emotions he clearly likes to keep hidden.

I see them all.

A villain isn't always terrible and cruel and frightening. Sometimes they're vulnerable and soft and gentle. I only know this because my heart is falling for one.

I see you, Leo Morelli, whether you like it or not.

"Stay true to your word, and I'll stay true to mine." I sit up and toss the towel off me as I fish through my wallet for a certain business card. "Let me make the call."

He pulls out my phone, standing close so he can watch me. The phone no longer requires a lock code, which means Scout already changed that feature. If Leo wasn't breathing down my neck, I'd change it or delete the photos or something. Instead, I make my call.

"Hello?"

"Perry, please come pick me up. I need a ride to the ball."

Silence and then, "Is everything okay?"

"I had a dress mishap. Would your sisters happen to have an extra?"

There's no way in hell I will allow the Terror Triplets the satisfaction of going to Winston's birthday bash thinking they have the upper hand and that they won.

"I'll see what I can do."

"Hurry," I croak out. "I'll text you my address."

"I'm on my way."

Leo takes my phone and shuts it off before pocketing it again. He studies me, his body rippling with power. Finally, he pats me on top of the head. "Don't make me ruin your life, because I won't even blink while destroying everything. This may be about Constantine, but I will take you down in a heartbeat. Are we clear?"

"Crystal clear."

He walks over to my jar of cherry Starburst and grabs a handful before pocketing them. "I'll be in touch, Miss Elliott. Very soon." He stalks out of my room without a backwards glance.

They've taken my money, my phone, and my laptop. I've been left destroyed and threatened into submission. There's not a happy ending to this story.

I take a deep, calming breath as my mind begins to plot and plan. The Morellis may think I'm a weak little princess they can manipulate and terrorize into obeying.

There's only one man I allow to terrorize me into obedience.

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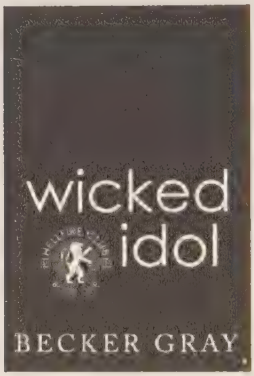

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Money can buy anything. And anyone.

As the head of the Constantine family, I'm used to people bowing to my will. Cruel, rigid, unyielding—I'm all those things. When I discover the one woman who doesn't wither under my gaze, but instead smiles right back at me, I'm intrigued.

Ash Elliott needs cash, and I make her trade in crudeness and degradation for it. I crave her tears, her moans. I pay for each one. And every time, she comes back for more.

When she challenges me with an offer of her own, I have to decide if I'm willing to give her far more than cold hard cash.

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